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# SERMONS

ON

# IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

REV. DAVID TAPPAN, D. D.
HOLLIS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY
AT CAMBRIDGE.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED A

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR;

AND A

SERMON

PREACHED AT HIS FUNERAL BY DR. HOLMES.

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Channing

DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, TO WIT:

BE it remembered, that on the fifteenth day of August, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seven, in the thirty-second year of the Independence of the United States of America, *Mary Tappan*, of said District, has deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof she claims as proprietor, in the words following, to wit: "Sermons "on important Subjects, by the late Rev. DAVID TAPPAN, D. D. "Hollis Professor of Divinity in the University at Cambridge. "To which are prefixed a Biographical Sketch of the Author; "and a Sermon preached at his Funeral by Dr. Holmes."

In conformity to the Act of the Congress of the United States, "intituled, "An Act for the encouragement of learning, by se- "curing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors "and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein men- "tioned:" and also to an Act, intitled, "An Act supplementa- "ry to an Act, intitled, An Act for the encouragement of learn- "ing, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the "authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times there- "in mentioned; and extending the benefits thereof to the arts "of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other "prints."

WILLIAM S. SHAW, *Clerk of the District of Massachusetts.*

A true copy of Record,
Attest, W. S. SHAW, Clerk.

# *ADVERTISEMENT.*

THE Discourses, which constitute this volume, were selected from the manuscripts of the author, since his decease, by a number of his friends, who carefully revised, and in most instances transcribed them for the press. As these Sermons were not written for publication, some verbal and other minute alterations became necessary previously to their appearance in print; these the editors have taken the liberty to make; but in no instance have they intentionally changed the meaning of the author.

The editors are responsible for the selection of these discourses, and the printers for the correctness and neatness of the dress in which they appear. In respect both to the matter and the execution, a hope is entertained, that the patrons of the work will be gratified.

Short Memoirs of the Life of the Author are prefixed to this volume, containing facts and information not to be found in Dr. Holmes' discourse delivered at his funeral, which is prefixed to this volume.

The editors have fulfilled a task, which has cost them considerable attention and labour; but they have an ample reward in reflecting, that they have rescued from oblivion the productions of a man of genius, learning, and piety, which will be read with delight and improvement, not only by the present, but by future generations.

With affectionate respect to the memory of the author, these discourses are humbly commended to the blessing of Heaven, and the patronage of the friends of Christain truth, by

THE EDITORS.

Aug. 20, 1807.

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# MEMOIRS

OF THE

## Life, Character, and Writings

OF THE

REV. DAVID TAPPAN, D. D.

TO record the principal events in the lives of eminent men, and to delineate their characters, has always been considered a useful undertaking. "We naturally wish to be acquainted with those, who delight and instruct us, and to whose labours we feel ourselves indebted. Biographical memoirs, if faithfully executed, gratify this wish." We are peculiarly interested, when we behold a remarkable genius early displaying its powers, growing up to quick maturity, devoted to the most useful and sacred purposes, and cut off by death in the midst of its activity. Examples of this kind proclaim to us the uncertain tenure of human life, and yet teach us, that those, who have only a short passage through this world, may confer permanent benefits on mankind, and obtain a place in their esteem more lasting, and more honourable, than monuments of stone.

The Creator, designing the subject of these memoirs for a very important station, imparted to him corresponding advantages. By the talents which he inherited from nature, together with his moral and literary improvements, he was qualified for extensive usefulness. He was born April 21, 1752. His father, the Rev. Benjamin Tappan, of Manchester, had the principal

care of his first years, and taught him the elements of knowledge. Early in life he discovered marks of a very ingenious, active mind. Before his admission into the university, he was placed, for a time, under the tuition of Mr. Samuel Moody, Preceptor of Dummer Academy. At the age of fourteen years he was admitted into Harvard University. There, rising above juvenile follies and vices, and maintaining the character of a soberminded and virtuous youth, he diligently and successfully sought useful knowledge. Extending his views into future life, he preferred those attainments, which are solid and durable, before those which are showy or splendid. He was distinguished for ardent love of knowledge, for his blameless and serious conduct, and for his dutiful regard to the laws and guides of the institution.*

After leaving the university, he assiduously devoted his mind, more than two years, to the study of divinity, though occasionally employed in teaching a school. Indeed he had bestowed an uncommon share of attention on moral and religious subjects while at college, and from his earliest youth. Beside which, it is to be remembered, that early maturity was a remarkable trait in the character of his mind. Accordingly, his first performances in the desk displayed a fund of theological information, procured him a high place in the public es-

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*The following notes are extracted from a manuscript sermon delivered shortly after the death of Dr. Tappan, by a very intimate and discerning friend, and brother in the ministry, who for many years was united with him in the same Association.*

* During the third year of his collegiate life, "a sickness, which brought him to a near view of death, was the means of such awakening and convictions, as he had not known before, and was followed, some months after, with such views of mind and actings of heart in divine things, as gave a new direction even to his unblamed and comparatively innocent life."

teem, and indicated the eminence, which he afterward attained. His hearers were surprised with the extent and pertinence of his thoughts, with his accurate and copious style, with the animation and solemnity of his utterance, and the fervour of his devotions.

A very harmonious church and society in Newbury soon invited his ministerial labours. At the age of twenty-one, he was ordained the pastor of that flock, in which office he continued about eighteen years.

He chose the sacred office from principle. It was his deliberate judgment, that the gospel ministry is, of all professions, the most important to mankind. That work, involving the best interests of intelligent creatures, accorded with his benevolence and piety. He made it the delightful business of his life to recommend to others that Saviour, whose glory had captivated his heart. He had the peculiar advantage, which belongs to all ministers, who are called of God, that when he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ, "he spake what he knew, and testified what he had seen." To this undoubtedly must be ascribed, in a great measure, his impressive manner of preaching. He spake from the fulness of his heart. No hearer could doubt, that he felt the reality and eternal importance of the truths he delivered.

As a preacher, he was *evangelical*. The peculiar contents of the gospel were the principal subjects of his discourses. "He determined to know nothing, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." The gospel, as a revelation of grace to sinners, was the great subject, which he studied and explained. "Sensible that the revelation of mediatorial mercy is the chosen instrument of saving a ruined world; that he was divinely commissioned to publish and enforce it for this end; and that

its final completion will embrace the order, perfection, and happiness of the moral world, and the highest glory of its Author; he dwelt upon the sublime subject with eager and profound attention."* Those doctrines, which are the groundwork of revelation, were the groundwork of his preaching. Scarcely a sermon came from his lips, in which some of the peculiarities of evangelical truth were not found.

He was a very *practical* preacher. Every gospel doctrine, he insisted, has its corresponding precept and duty. Speaking of the doctrines of human depravity, and salvation by the mercy of God, the atonement of Christ, and the sanctification of the Spirit, he says; "from these doctrines immediately result the duties of evangelical repentance and humility, faith and hope, gratitude and love, obedience and joy." He gave it as his opinion, "that Christian piety and morality must rise or fall, as the doctrines of grace, which support and exalt them, are regarded or neglected." By these sentiments he regulated his preaching. Whenever he inculcated the duties of Christianity, he did it chiefly by evangelical motives. Whenever he described a good man, he described him, as a character formed upon gospel principles; as a redeemed penitent sinner, pardoned through Christ, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. He represented the believer's inward exercises and whole practice, as having a constant respect to the great scheme of mediatorial grace. In his painting of virtue and religion you would not see the image of Seneca or Plato, but that of David or Paul. You would hear the Christian, of his describing, humbly proclaiming the abundant grace of Christ, and, from a heart enraptured with his divine beauty, crying out, "Unto him, who hath loved us,

* Dr. Tappan's own words in describing a Christian minister.

and washed us from our sins in his blood, be honour and glory forever." At the same time he made it appear, that such affection to Christ is not only the surest evidence of an upright heart, but the most efficacious motive to a pious and useful life.

Dr. Tappan was impressed with the importance of *plain* and *distinguishing preaching*. He was happy in commanding a style, which had charms for all. While the refined hearer enjoyed its flowing elegance, the unrefined was edified with its plainness. Deeply affected himself with the necessity and worth of true religion, he laboured to describe it intelligibly and correctly, and to discriminate its saving exercises and fruits from every deceitful imitation. To this work his mind was early directed by the perusal of EDWARDS' Treatise on Religious Affections. It was often the drift of his discourses to point out the essential difference between the sanctified affections of the believer, and the best exercises of the unrenewed heart. It was his serious endeavour, "to lay open the human heart to the view of mankind; to trace its windings, its disguises, its corruptions; to expand all its latent seeds of abomination; to pluck off its mask of apparent virtue; to unfold the secret principles of human conduct, and distinguish appearances from realities; to detect the various biasses of self love and self deceit; to delineate every shape and form, which the unsanctified heart in various circumstances will assume, so that every sinner might see and recognise himself in the draught, and all classes of natural men .... might so perceive their moral diseases, as immediately to look for a suitable remedy."*

He was a very *affectionate* preacher. When addressing his fellow immortals, his heart was often enlarged

* Dr. T.'s sermon at the ordination of Rev. Timothy Dickinson.

and melted. His countenance, his voice, his gestures had all the natural marks of kind concern. His hearers, however reproved and alarmed, were convinced, that he spoke from love; that the mortifying reproof and painful alarm he gave, were meant for their good. They saw and felt, that the preacher was an ardent friend to their souls, and that he did not inflict the wound, which faithfulness required him to inflict, without reluctance and grief.*

He studied *variety* in his preaching. He thought a minister's usefulness greatly abridged, by confining himself within a small circle of favourite speculations. Accordingly he took an extensive range, and aimed to introduce that pleasing variety of topics, which the scriptures furnish; though, after all, it was manifest, that he made evangelical religion the sum and centre of his preaching. The variety in his preaching was increased by his method of adapting his performances to particular occasions. In this he discovered remarkable facility and pertinence. He readily entered into the spirit of every occasion, and said what was suitable and impressive. Beside his appropriate performances on sacramental and funeral occasions, he frequently noticed the great events of Providence in the natural, civil, and religious world, and used them to elucidate some interesting truth, or enforce some important duty.

* "It is probable, that his great modesty and meekness disarmed envy, and called forth a sentiment at once tender and respectful. He was not a thundering preacher; but he spoke in a manner eminently enlightened, energetic, and persuasive; and perhaps the meekness of his air was a foil, to set off the strong sensibilities of his mind. His elocution was not of the splendid kind; but it was nature feelingly expressed. All his soul entered into his sermons. Every distinct subject appeared deeply to impress him; and the vivid perceptions of his mind enlivened every sentence and every word. He had, above most others, the faculty of losing himself in his subject."

In the *Christian pastor* we seldom find so much to be admired, as in Dr. Tappan. His virtues and exertions, as a minister, seemed evidently to result from his personal piety. This gave beauty, uniformity, and usefulness to his whole pastoral character. What he did for the promotion of religion, he did, not because his reputation and office required it, but because he had an operative, abiding conviction, that religion is unspeakably amiable in itself, and above all things interesting to men. In the discharge of his sacred duties, he appeared only to act out the benevolence, the humility, the meekness, and the devotion, which divine grace had wrought in his own soul.

With powers of mind and qualities of heart, which attracted general esteem and admiration, he was modest and humble, delicate and unassuming, ever attentive to the claims of others, and ready to sacrifice his own. He relished the condescending and self denying duties of his office, taking pleasure "in instructing, reproving, and comforting the lowest forms of human nature." His meekness was as remarkable, as his humility. His sacred office, giving him intercourse with persons of every character, called for the frequent exercise of Christian meekness. When tried by the ignorance and stupidity, or by the perverseness and injustice of men, he was calm and collected. The irritation of others did not irritate him.

*He was remarkably free from a worldly spirit.* For earthly riches and grandeur he had no relish. Far nobler objects occupied his thoughts, attracted his love, and roused his exertions. The riches of religion, the attainment of knowledge and holiness, the spread of evangelical truth, the display of divine perfection, the salvation of men,—these were the great objects, which

commanded his mind and heart. His soul seemed to be exalted above those contrivances and cares, which are necessary to the acquisition of wealth. His insatiable thirst for knowledge, and his sedulous attention to pastoral duties, left him little opportunity and little inclination for worldly concerns. His temporal interests were, therefore, chiefly entrusted to the prudence and fidelity of others. Superior to fretfulness and anxiety, he accepted, without murmuring, a salary quite inadequate to his support, humbly confiding in the bounty of Providence, and in the generosity of affectionate individuals. His moral taste was so refined, and the plan of his conduct so devout, that it was his deliberate choice to live at a distance from luxury and show. What he possessed of this world's goods, he valued chiefly as the means, not of private gratification, but of promoting the welfare of others. Free, in a good measure, from the incumbrance of worldly cares and pursuits, he consecrated his talents to sacred duties. While he sustained the pastoral office, he devoted a great portion of his time to study.* His acquaintance with the old English authors was extensive. The treasures of truth contained in Owen, Howe, Goodwin, Bates, Baxter, &c. raised them in his estimation far above the greater part of more polished moderns. The best models of refined composition he, nevertheless, studied with diligence, and imitated with success. What the old authors wanted in point of elegance, he aimed to supply from accomplished moderns. And what most of the moderns want in point of solid information, he sup-

* "With all that was remarkable in him, nothing was more so, than constant mental action, and an ardent desire to be ever improving. Hence he was as uncommon a hearer, as speaker; his eye, his attention, unremittingly fixed, so that nothing of consequence seemed to escape him; and he was very happy in retaining the valuable ideas, he had once acquired."

plied from the old authors. In the old authors he found the body of divine truth; in the new, its more comely and engaging dress.

Though his abilities might have raised him to eminence in general erudition; he wisely chose to limit his attention principally to those branches of knowledge, which are allied to theology, and have the most promising influence on ministerial usefulness. He never sacrificed to ambition or taste the regular duties of his office. First of all he attended to the work of the ministry. His stated sermons he composed with much study and accuracy. He carefully furnished himself for every common as well, as for every special occasion. Though his apprehension was quick and his invention fertile; and though he had a remarkable facility in fixing his attention, and in arranging and expressing his thoughts; yet he did not allow himself to enter the desk without thorough preparation. For several years, he wrote his discourses at full length. But afterward his increasing employments and avocations frequently permitted him to write only the plan and leading sentiments; and sometimes he preached wholly extempore.

For the duties and delights of friendship he was peculiarly formed. His religion disposed him to sympathy, tenderness, and love. Kind affection lighted up his countenance, gave a delightful glow to his conversation, and cheerfulness to every beneficent action he performed. In him appeared true Christian politeness. The gentleness and suavity of his manners were not the substitute, but the spontaneous expression of sincere kindness. So mild and obliging was his disposition, that it cost him an effort to refuse even an improper request, or in any

way to give pain to others. In the whole intercourse of social life he was studious to please, cautious of offending, and slow to be offended. His deportment and conversation bespoke an unsuspecting simplicity of heart, a dignified sense of propriety, and serious regard to moral and religious obligation. He maintained a chaste and sober cheerfulness, by which he constantly gave evidence, that religion is a productive source of the best enjoyments.

His people always found him a friend, a brother, a father. He was a guide to inexperienced youth, a pious comforter to old age, a counsellor in difficulties, a support to the afflicted. In the chamber of sickness he was a serious, tender, and prayerful visitant. And while he delighted to participate and sooth the troubles of his people, he was no less ready to rejoice in their prosperity, and to esteem their happiness a part of his own. Love seemed to be the ruling principle of his pastoral conduct. Even when he administered reproof to any of his flock, a task the least of all congenial to his feelings, he gave them evidence, that their reprover was their friend.

The cause of vital, experimental religion was dear to his heart. With great satisfaction he read accounts of what God had recently done in many parts of the world. He rejoiced to observe the deep religious impressions, which usually take place where God pours out his Spirit. To promote such impressions among his own people, particularly in the latter years of his pastoral work, he was instant in season, and out of season.

He was a *very ardent friend to his country.* United by the strongest affection to the cause of the public, he warmly espoused the principles of those men, whom he considered as honest patriots. In conformity to those

principles, he vindicated the rights, unfolded the dangers, and inculcated the duties of his country, without entering into the violence of party spirit, or detracting from the dignity and sacredness of his station.

He possessed an uncommon degree of *Christian candour;* that candour which is the operation of an enlarged mind and a benevolent heart. He was an equitable judge of the characters, and a mild interpreter of the actions of men. Toward them, who differed from him in belief, he cherished a very kind and generous affection. He knew too well the constitution of the human mind; he had too much regard to the right of private judgment and the use of free inquiry; he was too wise, too modest, and too just to indulge in himself, or to encourage in others a dogmatical, intolerant spirit. His candour prevented him from passing sentence upon persons or things without the authority of scripture; from giving way to groundless suspicions and jealousies; from judging of men's state with reference to divine acceptance, upon grounds not expressly determined by the gospel; from imputing to others opinions, which they disavow, and from overlooking their excellencies, because mingled with faults. His candour was a branch of that *love, which suffereth long and is kind; which thinketh no evil; which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.* His charity was benevolence; benevolence restricted to no particular denomination, or even character; though it had not the same operation toward all. Like the charity of Jesus Christ, it was cordial complacency in them, who obeyed the truth. But toward the erroneous and irreligious, it was mingled disapprobation, compassion, and good will; disapprobation of their errors and sins, compassion for their miseries, and good will to their souls. His charity

as well, as his judgment, led him to mourn the relaxed opinions of religion, which prevail at this day. Inspired with the spirit of other times, when the glory of New England piety shone forth, he greatly lamented its decline. In his view, modern liberality stripped the gospel of all its glory. Socinianism he pronounced *a cold, lifeless system, the name without the essence of Christianity*. He considered it as taking away the life and soul of religion, and as very near the confines of infidelity. In the spread of this and other forms of antichristian theology, he clearly saw the decay of vital piety, the peril of immortal souls, and the desolation of Zion.

In June, A. D. 1792, the corporation and overseers of Harvard University, harmoniously invited him to the office of Professor of Divinity. His learning and piety, his religious sentiments, and his aptness to teach, accorded with the design and statutes of those who founded the Professorship, and justified his appointment to the important office.* He considered his relation to his people so intimate and sacred, that he did not determine upon a separation without long and serious reflection, and such advice as deserved his confidence. The question was submitted to a very respectable ecclesiastical council, who unanimously voted, that duty and the general interest of religion required his removal. On the 26th of December, A. D. 1792, he was inaugurated, as Hollis Professor of Divinity in Harvard University.

In order to give a proper idea of his usefulness, it is necessary to observe, that, when he was introduced into the Professor's chair, the religious state of the University was very alarming. For some time the students had

* Among those, who were active in introducing him into the Professor's chair, were several who were his cotemporaries at the University, and had known him from his childhood. Of this number "was that excellent man, the late Lieutenant Governor PHILLIPS, than whom no one took a more earnest part in placing him in that station."

received no regular instruction in divinity. Books, containing the poison of deism, were eagerly read, and the minds of many corrupted. Immorality and disorder, in various shapes, had become prevalent, and mocked the power of persuasion and the arm of authority. Such was the state of things, when Professor Tappan entered on the duties of his office. The great object of his public and private lectures was, to defend the principles of natural and revealed religion, and to lead the students to the knowledge of their Maker and Redeemer. His whole official conduct was calculated to conciliate affection, to excite serious regard to divine truth, and to impress the importance of religious duty. Not expecting youth to overlook their pleasure in their love of improvement, he aimed, in his public lectures, to unite entertainment with information. He happily combined brevity with fulness, and animation with exactness. He was didactic, yet persuasive; profound, and yet pathetic. It was impossible for young men of liberal minds to hear his public lectures, with the well adapted and fervent prayers which introduced and closed them, without a conviction, that religious truth could be vindicated by argument, and that Christian goodness ennobled the soul, and yielded the best enjoyments. So singular was the assemblage of excellent qualities in his public performances at the University, that the nicest criticism could complain of no inelegance in the style, and the most metaphysical, of no unfairness in argument; while the warmest piety was raised to a higher and purer flame. It must not be omitted, that his evangelical sentiments and puritan morals were greatly conducive to his usefulness, as a professor. In consequence of his influence, infidelity among the students was gradually confounded, profanity and irreligion were awed and restrained, and the science of God was

studied with more seriousness and delight; and it soon became customary in all public performances, to speak of Christianity in terms of respect and veneration. The religious public manifested a growing attachment to the University, and cherished a pleasing hope, that the youth, educated there, would not only be instructed in human science, but guarded against infidelity, and initiated into the true principles of the oracles of God.

During his professorship, he was frequently invited to preach in the neighbouring societies, and sometimes in distant places. His preaching was remarkably acceptable. There was not wanting in his performances something to command the respect of the wicked, to please the taste of the polished, and refresh the souls of the saints. He willingly laboured in the ministry even above his strength, gladly embracing every opportunity to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to spread the savour of pure religion. "He was indeed a burning and shining light."

But that shining light was suddenly extinguished. When his amiable character had become generally known; when his prospect of usefulness was growing brighter; when the sphere of his activity was extending, and the energies of his mind were most constantly exerted, his prospect was overspread, and his useful life closed. When ministers are best qualified to do good in the world, then are they often most ripe for the kingdom of heaven. To replenish the celestial mansions, the excellent of the earth are taken away.

Let the reader, for a moment, turn aside, and behold that scene, where the good man's character is tried. Though Dr. TAPPAN's sickness was short, it was long enough to display his piety, and to glorify the Saviour in whom he believed. The notice of his approaching

dissolution, though very sudden, did not discompose him.* With many expressions of humility and self abasement, he declared his hope in the infinite mercy of God through the atonement of Christ. In redeeming grace he found rest to his soul. After such solemn and prayerful examination of himself, as becometh a man hastening to the bar of eternal justice, he found reason to hope, that he was the subject of saving religion, and finally had strong consolation.

Only one or two particulars of his dying exercises will be mentioned. When his wife expressed some of the tender feelings, which were excited by the thought of parting with him, he said; "*If God is glorified, I am made forever.* Can't you lay hold of that? Can't you lay hold of that?" To his sons, then undergraduates, he expressed his paternal concern for the welfare of the University. On being told, that the students were more attentive, than they had been to the Bible, he replied; *Well, the Bible ever has been, and ever will be the best guide for young men.* He died Aug. 27, A. D. 1803, aged 51.

Doctor Tappan's death was no common calamity. To the surviving partner and children, and other near connexions, the affliction was indescribable. Youthful genius and virtue mourned the decease of a friend and patron. The church and nation lost one, who had sought and prayed for their welfare. The University felt, that one of her pillars was fallen. Religion herself wept over the tomb of TAPPAN, who had pleaded her cause, lived for her honour, and rejoiced in the hope of her approaching triumph.

* Many interesting particulars respecting the character and death of Dr. T. will be found in the funeral sermon, which follows.

*The following is a complete List of the Publications of Dr. Tappan.*

1, 2. Two Discourses delivered on the Sabbath after his Ordination at Newbury.
3. A Sermon on the Character of Amaziah. 1782.
4. A Fast Sermon. 1783.
5. A Thanksgiving Discourse, on the Peace. 1783.
6. A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. Moses Parsons. Dec. 14, 1783.
7. Two friendly Letters to Philalethes. 1785.
8. A Sermon at the Ordination of Rev. Timothy Dickinson, Feb. 18, 1789.
9. Address to the Students of Andover Academy, July 18, 1791.
10. Election Sermon, May 30, 1792.
11. A Sermon before an Association at Portsmouth. 1792.
12. A Farewel Sermon at Newbury. 1793.
13. A Fast Sermon delivered at Cambridge and Charlestown, April 11, 1793.
14. A Sermon at the Ordination of the Rev. John T. Kirkland, Feb. 5, 1794.
15. A Sermon on eight persons drowned at Newbury, July 24, 1794.
16. A Discourse to the Class, which was graduated in 1794.
17. A Discourse to the Class, which entered in 1794.
18. An Address to Andover Students, July, 1794.
19. A Thanksgiving Sermon at Charlestown, Feb. 19, 1795.
20. A Discourse on the Death of John Russell, student, Nov. 17, 1795.
21. A Discourse to the Class, which entered in 1796.
22. A Sermon before the Convention of Ministers, June 1, 1797.
23. A Fast Sermon at Boston and Charlestown, April 5, 1798.
24, 25. Two Sermons at Plymouth, after the Ordination of the Rev. James Kendall, Jan. 5, 1800.
26. A Discourse on the Death of Gen. Washington, Feb. 21, 1800.
27. A Sermon at the Ordination of the Rev. Nathaniel H. Fletcher, 1800.
28. A Sermon on the Death of Lieut. Gov. Phillips. 1802.
29. A Sermon at the Installation of Rev. Hezekiah Packard, Sept. 1802.
30. A Discourse on the Death of Enos Hitchcock, D. D. Providence, 1803.
31. A Sermon on the Death of Mrs. Mary Dana, April, 1803.
32. Lectures on Jewish Antiquities. 1807.
33. Sermons on Important Subjects.

A

# DISCOURSE,

*DELIVERED AT CAMBRIDGE,*

AUGUST 29, 1803,

AT THE FUNERAL

OF THE

## *REV. DAVID TAPPAN, D. D.*

HOLLIS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

WHO DIED ON THE 27th OF AUGUST, Æt. LI.

BY ABIEL HOLMES, A. M.

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN CAMBRIDGE.

# A DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT THE

# FUNERAL OF DR. TAPPAN.

ACTS xi. 24. *He was a good man.*

THE solemn stilness and melancholy aspect of this assembly, silently, but expressively, apply this character to the man, whose obsequies we are called to celebrate. Ye fix your eyes on these relics, and your first thought is, *He was a good man.* A sentiment so spontaneous and so universal, as this, carries with it one of the strongest evidences of its justness and truth. With this *witness in yourselves*, therefore, ye are already prepared to attend to the delineation of the character, and happiness, of a good man, with special reference to the person, whose death we lament, and to the occasion, which hath convened us in this temple.

The person, to whom this character was applied in the passage now recited, was Barnabas. His very name denotes the benignity and sweetness of his temper; for it was given him by his fellow apostles, as expressive of his character. He was originally a Levite, of the Island of Cyprus; but had now become a sincere and zealous convert to Christianity. With the change of his religion, the apostles changed his name Joses, by surnaming him *Barnabas*, which signifies, *The son of consolation.* At the very first time of his introduction to our notice by the sacred historian, he ap-

pears in the generous act of selling his estate, to annex it to the fund, which the apostles were now raising for the regular and stated relief of poor Christians. We find him next engaged in the benevolent office of introducing Paul to the disciples at Jerusalem. When this Christian convert, soon after his conversion, attempted to associate with the disciples, "they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas," with that benevolence and kindness, for which he seems always to have been distinguished, "took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." The extent of the benefit often rendered to an individual, and through him to the world, by one such seasonable act of kindness, performed by a good man, is incalculable.

In the next instance, Barnabas is presented to our view in the high character of an ambassador of Christ, employed on a very difficult, but most important mission. In Antioch, the capital of Syria, which for magnitude, situation, and other advantages, was the third city in the Roman empire,* there had recently been numerous conversions to the faith of Christ. The converts, made in this city, were the first fruits of the devout Gentiles out of Palestine. Of these converts there was formed a large Christian church, which was considered as the parent of the Gentile churches. In addition to these facts, chiefly collected from the sacred history, a credible historian† in-

* See Benson's History of the first planting of the Christian Religion, I. 246.

† Josephus.

forms us, that there was a Jewish university in the city of Antioch. What a combination of great and good qualities ought that Christian minister to possess, who should be *set for the defence of the gospel*, in such a city! No sooner did the church at Jerusalem receive intelligence of the success of the gospel in this Syrian capital, than it *sent forth Barnabas*, as the person best qualified to confirm the young converts in the faith; and by his able ministrations, by his conciliating manners, and by his excellent spirit, to silence their adversaries. The event fully justified their choice. When Barnabas came to Antioch, and *beheld the grace of God*, manifested to the Christians in that city, *he was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord.* The exhortation, from his mouth, was peculiarly graceful and energetic; *for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith; and much people was added to the Lord.*

In this amiable and excellent apostle, we discern some of the prominent traits of a good man. But this character requires a more particular delineation. *A good man* must not, for a moment, be imagined a phrase, to denote a perfect character. In an absolute sense there is but *one good* Being, *that is God. There is not a just man upon earth, who doth good, and sinneth not.* Imperfection belongs to all creatures, especially to the apostate sinners of the human race.

When therefore any one of the sons of men is called *a good man*, nothing more can be justly intended by the expression, than that he is prevalently, and habitually, a man of virtue and piety.

A good man has radically a holy temper. By the apostasy, the image of God in the human soul has

become polluted and defaced. The restoration of this image to its original purity and glory is the grand design of that redemption, which is revealed and proclaimed in the gospel. The very name of the Son of God was intended to express this design. *Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.* This design the apostles of Christ, in conformity to the spirit of their Master's counsel and example, kept religiously in view. The doctrine of Paul was the doctrine of all the apostles: *Our Saviour Jesus Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* The actual influence of the gospel, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, corresponds with the primary design of redemption. It recovers sinners, of the most vile and profligate character, to a holy temper. *Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.* The tendencies of the renewed soul are turned from sin to holiness. The affections of every good man are supremely fixed on God, the holy and perfect Being, the source and the centre of all happiness. Whatever therefore is displeasing to God, is displeasing to him. He *hates vain thoughts;* but cherishes such as are innocent, and especially such as are of a virtuous and holy tendency. He *abhors* even *himself,* so far as he discovers himself to be opposed to God and virtue, and *repents as in dust and ashes.* Conscious of deep depravity, and of daily transgression, he entertains abasing sentiments of himself; and, while he takes the lowest place at the footstool of God, he is humble in his intercourse with man. Instead of cher-

ishing a persuasion, whether erroneous or just, of his own superiority to other men, he is habitually inclined to *esteem others better than himself.* He daily studies to regulate his appetites and passions; and desires, and prays, that *every thought* may be *brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.* Such is the habitual temper of a good man. A holy disposition is radically fixed in his soul.

A good man lives habitually a holy life. It is only such a life, that can render it suitable to apply to any one this elevated name and character. Latent goodness there may be, which has no opportunity to manifest itself in visible acts. Such virtue, wherever it exists, though unseen by any human eye, is seen, and will be finally approved, by the Judge of all the earth. But with no propriety can man call any one good, who does not, in his life, give visible proof of his integrity and piety. *By their fruits*, said the Saviour, *ye shall know them. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things.*

His piety toward God is discovered, by a reverential respect to his name, to his character, to his word, to his sabbaths, to his ordinances and laws; by a steady and devout performance of the duty of prayer, in the closet, in the family, and *in the assembly of the saints;* by a deep concern for the honour of God, and for the interests of his kingdom; and by a zealous and active endeavour to glorify him on the earth.

His benevolence toward man is discovered, by an habitual promptitude to rejoice with the cheerful, and to mourn with the sorrowful; by a readiness to forgive injuries, and to recompense good for evil; by a uniform aim to render to all their due, and to owe no

man any thing, but love; by doing good to all men, as he has opportunity and ability; by treating the actions of men with candour, and their persons with respect; and by doing what in him lies to promote the temporal comfort, and the eternal happiness, of the great family of mankind. The good man is more than strictly righteous. Rectitude, in its common acceptation, is too low a standard for his virtue. He *provides things honest*,* or beautiful, *not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of all men.* He endeavours, not merely to maintain such a course of conduct, as shall be free from just cause of censure, but such a course, as shall merit commendation. Not satisfied with merely *giving no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully*, he is desirous *by well doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.* Not content with the insignificant virtue of doing no dishonour to God and religion, he has a sacred ambition to *let* his *light so shine before men, that they may see* his *good works, and glorify* his *Father who is in heaven.*

Deep is the origin of his moral virtue, and proportionably extensive is its influence. It arises not from a vague perception of the beauty of virtue; from a sense of honour; from the fear of shame; from the traditions of ancestors; from a Christian education; from the hope of reward; from the fear of punishment. It springs from no such shallow or precarious sources. It takes its rise from that *well of water*, which *springs up into everlasting life.* Yonder is the fount, fast by the throne of God. A cordial belief in God and in his Son Jesus Christ, and in the great

* καλὰ, Rom. xii. 17. 2 Cor. viii. 21.

truths revealed in the divine word, is the source of the good man's virtue. How operative then, how incalculably extensive, must be its influence! "A vital faith in the gospel," to use the words of this good man, *who, being dead, yet speaketh,* "A vital faith in the gospel is a leading act and instrument of moral goodness. It sets before us the most correct and sublime standard of duty; it awakens sincere desires and efforts to reach it; while it gives to these efforts encouragement and strength, perseverance and success. By bringing pardon to the penitent, and grace to the humble; by engaging divine power to uphold, and eternal life to reward the faithful Christian, it inspires him with invincible courage and activity in the pursuit of perfection and glory. His sincere trust in and loyalty to Christ secure a virtuous improvement of all his talents, a diligent fulfilment of all his engagements, whether civil or religious, and a steady performance of the various duties, which his particular calling or relations impose." These are but the outlines of the character of a good man. In his life we see them filled up, and shining forth, *in* all *the beauties of holiness.*

His happiness must be summarily noticed. It is a happiness, that partly results from his temper and character in this life; and which will be rendered complete and perfect in the life to come. *A good man,* saith Solomon, *shall be satisfied from himself.* No man has such resources for comfort, and for rational enjoyment, as the man of religion. Such resources! The irreligious man has none. *Having no hope, and without God in the world,* he can have nothing, which can give him happiness or repose. He is

*like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest.* His unhallowed passions, and upbraiding conscience, must perpetually agitate or torment him. The decree of Heaven too hath determined this awful destiny. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

But the good man has perpetual resources of comfort and happiness. The regulation of his passions and appetites is propitious to his tranquillity and peace; the approbation of his conscience gives him pleasure, with which *a stranger doth not intermeddle;* the hope of pardon and of "the applauding smile of Heaven" inspires him with holy and elevated delight; and the prospect of the perfection of his spirit and of the completion of his felicity, in the paradise of God, fills him *with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*

While the good man has such sources, as these, for comfort in life; he has *hope in death.* At that solemn and eventful period, when the world recedes, and its fairest prospects vanish; he is able to *look up*, and to *lift up* his *head, for* his *redemption draweth nigh.* He is willing that his *earthly house of this tabernacle* should be *dissolved;* because he has *a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* Death, in his view, is not a king of terrors, but a messenger of peace. In the language of sacred triumph, he exclaims: *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day. I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*

These are but the harbingers of that bliss, which is reserved for the good man in heaven. There his felicity will be completed. There the holy tendencies of his soul will be carried into full effect. When he shall mingle with the spirits of *just* men *made perfect*, his own spirit shall attain perfection in holiness. Casting his crown before the throne, he shall unite with all the *ransomed of the Lord* in ascriptions of praise *unto him who loved* them, *and washed* them *from* their *sins in his own blood;* and shall partake with them in that fulness of joy, which is in the presence of God, and in those *pleasures*, which are *at his right hand forevermore.*

In that plenitude of joy, in those everlasting pleasures, the spirit of our departed FRIEND is, we trust, now participating; for *he was a good man.*

He appeared radically to possess a holy temper. The habitual tendencies of his soul seemed to be toward God and religion. He always discovered a quick sensibility to right and wrong, to holiness and sin. Actions in any respect praiseworthy gave him delight, which he was neither desirous nor able to conceal. Signal acts of beneficence, or of piety, awakened in his bosom strong emotions of pleasure, and received his ardent commendation. The vices of individuals, especially flagrant and prevalent sins, excited at once his grief and abhorrence. It was very apparent, that *sin*, whether committed by others or by himself, was in his view *exceeding sinful.* Hence he appears to have been excited to *keep his* own *heart with all diligence; to stand in awe, and sin not.* He was equally prompt and skilful to avail himself of every occurrence for infusing religious instruction into the mind, or for impressing it on the heart. He singularly exemplified the apostolical precept: *Let your speech be*

*alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.* He seemed to *have no greater joy, than to see men walking in truth,* and to aid them in a holy course. He had his own *conversation in heaven,* and was studious to raise that of others to the same sacred height. If then the treasure determines where the heart is; if the fruit designates the quality of the tree; if the stream demonstrates the nature of the fountain; we have just ground to conclude, that he had a holy temper; that a sanctified heart was the vital principle of his religion; that he was *born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

This conclusion is justified by the holiness of his life. In the performance of the duties of piety he was uniformly exemplary. As his heart was engaged, so his life was occupied, *about his Father's business.* The honour of God and of his Son Jesus Christ, and the advancement of the Christian cause, were objects dear to his soul; and to the promotion of them he was zealously devoted.

In the performance of moral and relative duties, he was upright and faithful. His benevolence to mankind was habitually shown, by his tender sympathy in their distresses; by his readiness to relieve their temporal or spiritual wants; by his generous hospitality; and especially by his unabating desire and aim to bring all men, who were within the reach of his influence, to the knowledge of the truth, that they might be saved. His religion, derived from the fountain of purity, was *pure and undefiled* in its nature, extensive and sublime in its influence. It inspired him with a philanthropy, which counterfeit virtue can never feign. It prompted him, *to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God; to visit the fatherless and widows, in their affliction; and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

His mental powers, and his literary attainments, accompanied and sanctified by such eminent virtue and piety, signally qualified him for those high stations, which were assigned to him by the great Head of the church. His mind was distinguished for its vigour and activity. It was much employed in deep contemplation; and was fertile in thoughts, at once original and entertaining, solid and refined, practical and useful. While he thought for himself, he was respectfully and delicately attentive to the sentiments of those, with whom he conversed. His unaffected modesty, which never forsook him, rendered him *swift to hear, slow to speak.*

He acquired his choicest learning in the school of that divine Teacher, who was *meek and lowly in heart.* There he imbibed the spirit of his Master. To those great sentiments, which he firmly believed, and ably vindicated, he never authoritatively demanded the assent of others. If a subject were of small importance, he made the most generous allowance for that diversity of opinion, which, among imperfect beings, of different dispositions, education, and habits, seems inevitable. His candour was, accordingly, equal to his humility. In disputation he was neither virulent, nor captious. Disregarding what affected not the merits of the question, he fastened his attention on those great points, by which the question must plainly be decided. Here he displayed ingenuity of address, manliness of thought, and cogency of argument. Open and generous, he appeared honestly to contend, not for victory, but for truth.

With such an understanding and heart, united to the propitious opportunities and means of improvement, which he enjoyed at the university while a student, and

in his subsequent intercourse with literary men, he made high attainments in useful knowledge, especially in theology. To this sacred science his own pious dispositions, in connection with the profession to which he early devoted himself, naturally pointed his primary attention, and assiduous study.

After having *served God in the gospel of his Son* with *all good fidelity* eighteen years, among a people, who were affectionately attached to his person, and fondly delighted, as well as instructively edified, by his ministry; he was called forth to a higher and more extensive sphere of action. The rare assemblage of virtues and talents, which he possessed, and the celebrity of character, as a theologian, which he had now acquired, attracted the attention of Harvard University; and by the legislature of this Seminary he was chosen its Professor of Divinity.

More than ten years, he statedly performed the arduous duties of this very important office. With what ability and fidelity he discharged them, it were difficult for me to recite, and superfluous for you to hear. My voice can add nothing to his eulogium. *His praise is in all the churches.* Within the University he has left a memorial of his worth, more durable and more honorary than the monumental marble. Let it simply be remarked, that he was singularly diligent and laborious in the composition of his theological Lectures; that these Discourses embraced the entire body of divinity; that the order of them was natural and lucid; that the manner of their composure was a happy union of the argumentative and persuasive; that, together with convincing demonstrations of truth, they contained judicious refutations of error; that both their matter and form were discreetly adapted to the youthful and inquisitive

auditory, to which they were addressed; that they were pronounced with a seriousness and energy, which evinced the sincerity of the speaker; and that they were admirably calculated to form enlightened divines, and practical Christians.

As a preacher, his talents and character are too well known, to require elucidation. I cannot forbear however from remarking, that his discourses in the pulpit were uniformly such, as became a Christian minister. They were evangelical discourses, not moral essays. The great truths, which they contained, were derived, not from the philosophy of Plato, of Epictetus, or of Seneca, nor from the boasted oracle of human reason; but from the deep fountains of that *grace and truth*, which *came by Jesus Christ*. He taught the depravation of the heart; the necessity of its renovation by the Spirit of God; together with the utility and importance of the instituted means of religion. He greatly insisted on the divine character and mission, on the death and mediation, on the atonement and intercession, of Jesus Christ the Saviour. He often inculcated the duties of faith in Christ, repentance for sin, and a holy life, as essential to salvation. While he addressed religious truth to the understanding, he closely applied it to the conscience. The disguises of the heart he skilfully detected; its latent foldings he admirably penetrated. He reduced the sinner to such dilemmas; he so glaringly exposed the treachery of the false professor of religion, and the inconstancy of the true believer; that it was difficult for either to suppress the consciousness of guilt, and the confusion of shame. On retiring from this temple, after attending his ministrations, the address of Louis XIV. to the eloquent bishop of Clermont, after hearing him preach at Versailles, has often occurred to me: "Father, I have heard many great orators in this chap-

el; I have been highly pleased with them; but for you, whenever I hear you, I go away displeased with myself; for I see more of my own character."

While he thus alarmed conscious guilt, and confounded hypocrisy and impiety; he with wonderful facility encouraged the sincere, though feeble, tendencies to virtue, and poured the balm of comfort into the contrite heart. In conformity to the example of his great Master, a *bruised reed* did *he not break; and the smoaking flax* did *he not quench.* He took peculiar delight in *preaching good tidings to the meek;* in *binding up the broken hearted;* in *proclaiming liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them who are bound.* He was a Barnabas, *a son of consolation.*

While his public ministrations were uniformly interesting and impressive; his devotional exercises and discourses, on special occasions, were truly admirable. He intuitively discerned, and promptly seized, what would create in his auditory the deepest interest, and give to his discourse the liveliest impression; and employed the imagination and the senses, as handmaids to devotion and virtue. The weight and importance of his doctrines; the fertility and justness of his thoughts; the pertinency and beauty of his metaphors; the vigour and elegance of his style; the simplicity and pathos of his elocution; commanded the profound attention of his auditors. But he possessed one advantage, incomparably superior to all these combined excellencies, an advantage, which rendered his discourses irresistibly commanding and persuasive; *He was a good man.*

With such rare qualifications for the ministry, and with a heart filled with philanthropy, and animated with zeal to do good, it was natural for ministers, and for churches, in their afflictions or exigencies, to solicit his

solace and his aid. Such solicitations he knew not how to resist. *To his power (I bear record), yea, and beyond his power, he was willing of himself.* Alas! To this benevolent and pious charity he made the costly oblation of his last service. It was in the church at Brattle-Street* that he performed his last *labour of love.* Previously debilitated, he was inadequate to the public services of religion in that large edifice, and in a great assembly. The administration of the Lord's Supper increased the labours of that solemn day. From the sanctuary of God he repaired to his own home; retired to his chamber; sickened, and expired.

During his illness, he bore plenary testimony to those great truths of religion, which had been the chosen subjects of his ministry, and the sacred rule of his life. In an early stage of his sickness, his "hope," to use his own language, "was intermingled with overwhelming confusion, sorrow and shame." In its later stages, his disease was less spasmodic than it had previously been, and his mind was more tranquil. Among other interesting observations, he said; "The doctrines of grace, which contemplate men as sinners, and as requiring an infinite atonement, are the doctrines, which I must live and die by." On the morning of the day previous to his death, he had intimation of his danger.†

* In Boston, vacant by the death of the Rev. Dr. THACHER.

† He asked me, Whether I was able to collect any thing special from the physicians concerning his case. I told him, that I had not seen his physicians that morning; but gave him my own opinion of his danger, and advised him, if there were any thing on his mind, relating to his temporal or spiritual concerns, that he wished to disclose, to disclose it. He thanked me for the suggestion, and said, he would avail himself of it. He accordingly, during the day, addressed religious advice to his children, and took leave of his family.—His relapse from a hopeful progress toward recovery

Having, in a conversation that ensued, expressed his Christian hope; he was asked, Whether he did not build that hope on *the cornerstone laid in Sion, elect and precious.* "If I do not trust there," he replied, "I know not in what I do trust. I have nothing else to trust in. *Lord! to whom shall I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*" He was able to speak but little, during the day. After a prayer with him in the evening, he was more collected, and more capable of conversing, than he had been since the morning.

In this conversation (alas, the last!) he said; "I believe the necessity of a conformity of heart to the truths of the gospel." On being asked concerning his hope, he replied, "My hope is, that I possess the Christian temper;" then pausing a little, he added, "All my hopes are founded on the infinite mercy of God, and the perfect character and atonement of Christ." The next morning, he knew not his earthly friends; but he seemed still to *know in whom he believed.* At the close of prayer by his bedside, his eyes were steadfastly directed toward heaven; his lips gently moved—in that act his immortal spirit departed.

Shall *they, who are wise, shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they, who turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever?* Such, we believe, will be his everlasting splendour. Does *one star differ from another star in glory?* Of the first magnitude, and of the

was surprising to others; and the intimation of his danger was apparently unexpected to himself. The *manner,* in which he received it, furnishes occasion for stricture on that false tenderness, which conceals from the sick their danger, and from the dying the approach of death. If the sick person be prepared for death, he may, by being seasonably apprized of his danger, have opportunity to impart useful counsels, and to show "in what peace a Christian can die." If he be unprepared, how spurious is that friendship, which steals away the remnant of his time, by deceptive artifices, until there is *no place of repentance, though he seek it carefully with tears!*

strongest lustre, we are persuaded, will be this luminary.

To us, alas, it is extinguished! What a gloom does that extinction throw over a bereaved family, over the university, over this church and the churches in general, and over our commonwealth, and country!

With the afflicted Widow we tenderly sympathize; and devoutly commend her to that Being, who hath, with condescension as consoling as it is wonderful, styled himself a *Judge of the widows in his holy habitation.* The bereaved Children we commend to Him, *in whom the fatherless find mercy;* to Him, who hath said, *I will not leave you orphans;** *I will come unto you.* Ye have been taught by the counsel and example of a pious husband and father, how to suffer affliction. Remember that counsel; follow that example; and ye will find *strong consolation*, and great religious improvement. For the aged Mother, honoured and blest with one of the best of Sons, but surviving to witness the affecting scene of this day, we implore the benediction and solace of Almighty God. May He be her *present help in trouble;* her shield, to defend her; her staff, to sustain her; and her *exceeding great reward.* May the surviving brethren and sisters receive support and comfort from on high; and regard the heavenly admonition, emphatically addressed to them: *Be ye also ready.*

To the University we present our respectful and affectionate condolence. With the worthy President, Professors, and Tutors, we sincerely mourn, in the loss of their highly estimable friend, and very able and important auxiliary. May they, together with the Honourable and Reverend Members of the College Legisla-

*ὀρφανους. John xiv. 18.

ture, religiously observe this affecting and monitory event.

With the Students of the University we feel a sympathy, too deep for utterance. Ye have lost a friend and a father. Your spiritual guide, your moral and religious teacher is no more. His public and private instructions; his paternal advices and admonitions; his benign aspect; his sensibility to your best interests; his condescending and benevolent offices; all rush into your view, and overwhelm your hearts. Your tears flow. Ye *sorrow most of all, that* ye *shall see his face no more.* But let me not swell that tide of grief, already full. *Remember how* ye have *received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.* Let the instructions and counsels of that man of God, at whose feet ye have sitten with delight, be indelibly impressed on your memories, and perpetually influential on your lives. If ye respected him, if ye loved him, if ye applauded him, while living; if ye would honour his name and memory, when dead; be what he taught and exhorted you to be; be what it was his *heart's desire and prayer to God*, that ye might be; be what he was. *He was a good man.* Be ye followers of him in his diligence; in his activity; in his meekness; in his humility; in his candour; in his benevolence; in his piety. So shall ye obtain the good man's reward. Ye shall be blessings and ornaments to society: ye shall secure the approbation and applause of all the virtuous and the good; ye *shall obtain favour of the Lord;* ye shall have comfort in life, hope in death, and immortal glory.

The people of my Pastoral Charge will deeply bewail with me the removal of a good citizen, a good neighbour, a good man, from the bosom of our society. May we, dearly beloved, be unitedly humbled under that divine

stroke, which has deprived us of so rich and invaluable a blessing. His benevolent offices shall not be forgotten. May his kind and faithful ministrations in this sacred desk be specially remembered to our everlasting benefit!——Our sister churches in the capital, and in our vicinity, must peculiarly lament the death of the good man, from whom they have often received rich instruction and seasonable comfort. The church, to which he formerly ministered in holy things, will affectionately remember her once loved pastor; and mingle her tears with ours. Nor will any of the churches of New England be unmoved at the loss of one of their fairest ornaments and firmest pillars.

The Commonwealth must mourn the loss of this good man, who honoured her magistrates, vindicated her interests, and supported her laws.

My fathers and brethren in the Ministry! Too sensibly and tenderly do I feel my own loss, to remind you of yours. Has not our glory departed? Let us cherish a sacred ambition, that it may be revived in us. How can it otherwise be revived, than by our assuming, and daily observing, that divine motto, which he selected for us: HOLINESS TO THE LORD!*

What a deep gloom will be thrown over the approaching Anniversary!† How quick the transition from these funeral rites to the effusions of genius and science; from the darksome tomb to the literary festival! Let this mixture of various and opposite actions and events teach us impressively, to *let* our *moderation* be always *known;* and to *use, as not abusing, this world, the fashion* of which *passeth away.* In the midst of our com-

* The text of his Sermon before the Convention of Ministers, A.D. 1797.

† The public Commencement, in the ensuing week.

forts and pleasures let us ever remember, that *in the garden there is a sepulchre.*

The removal of this good man, my respected auditors, points us to yonder world; and admonishes us to be ready for our proper home. A voice seems to break from his lips, for the last time: ARISE, LET US GO HENCE.

# SERMONS

BY

## DAVID TAPPAN, D. D.

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# Sermon I.

## On Christian Zeal.

REVELATION iii. 19. *Be zealous.*

THESE words are part of our LORD's epistle to the church of Laodicea, one of the seven churches of Asia Minor, to each of which the King of Zion addresses counsels and admonitions, reproofs or praises, suited to its peculiar character and state. The letter before us begins with a concise description of the moral state of this church. It represents her as neither cold nor hot, but as lukewarm or indifferent in religion, and expresses the divine abhorrence of such a disposition. In the text it exhorts her to be *zealous* in religion, in opposition to her present deadness and formality.

As this Laodicean indifference in religious concerns marks too many nominal Christians at this day; while others are misled by a spirit of false zeal; a critical attention to this subject may be equally seasonable and advantageous. Let us, therefore, distinctly consider the nature, obligation and importance of Christian zeal.

Zeal is an equivocal term, equally capable of a good and bad signification. It is not so properly one particular passion, as the heat or fervour of the affections in general. The original word rendered *zealous* signifies *exceedingly hot;* which imports a vehement exercise of the passions. Zeal then is either good or bad, according to its direction and management. Accordingly,

the sacred writers frequently use the term in an ill sense, and sometimes in a virtuous one. St. Paul reckons it among *the works of the flesh*, that is, those vices which characterize the carnal and ungodly world. "The works of the flesh are hatred, strife, emulation," or zeal. So the *envying*, the *bitter envying* condemned by St. James is, in the original, zeal. The reason, why it is so often placed among the vices, is because the heat of human passions is for the most part irregular, either in its motive and object, or in its manner and degree of operation. Zeal becomes a virtue, only when our affections are fixed on proper objects, and suited, in manner and measure of exercise, to their nature and importance.

Genuine Christian zeal takes its rise in a well regulated or sanctified heart, and is equally opposed to careless indolence, and to a selfish, noisy, or censorious vehemence. It is a meek and humble, a kind and gentle flame, as full of tenderness and goodness, as it is of ardour and boldness. It is, in the first place, enlightened and directed by *knowledge*. Zeal, without this, is a blind and brutal impetuosity, which tends to precipitate its subject into an endless labyrinth of error, irregularity and mischief. A weak and ignorant mind and strong passions form a dreadful compound, and threaten deplorable consequences. If a man for want of knowledge think that to be the cause of GOD, which is directly the reverse, or that to be heretical or sinful, which is important truth or duty, it is evident that the more zealously he exerts himself in favour of the one, or in opposition to the other, in the same proportion he builds up falsehood and vice upon the ruins of truth and virtue. Where there is great heat and no light, it cannot be that illuminating fire which descendeth from above; but is

rather that dark, polluted flame, which fumes up from beneath, which is earthly, sensual, diabolical. Such was the zeal of the bulk of the Jews in the apostolic age: "they had a zeal for GOD, but not according to knowledge." They had a glowing fervour in maintaining those legal rites, which GOD himself had ordained; and from the impulse of this zeal for the law, they rejected Christ and his gospel, not knowing, as they might, or ought to have done, that HE was the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Thus the religious zeal of that generation, and of succeeding Jews to this day, was and is no better than blind, raging, obdurate infidelity. A clear and sound knowledge of the object is, therefore, essential to regular and virtuous zeal.

SECONDLY, it must also be tempered with *prudence*. For though the object of it be good, yet if there be not discretion to moderate and direct its career, it will become a pernicious and ungovernable fury, even in a virtuous cause. In the midst of the most pious zeal we have constant need of that caution, "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Prudence must adjust our religious ardour to the real weight and importance of things; lest like the ancient Pharisees, we exhaust our zeal upon the outlines and appendages of religion, and become regardless of its vital and essential branches. Great heat about circumstantials, and coldness respecting the substance of virtue and piety, argue either great ignorance or gross hypocrisy. Prudence must also direct our zeal in the choice of means for accomplishing our end. No pretended zeal for a good end can sanctify or warrant a bad action. It is a vicious, not a virtuous zeal to do evil that good may come; to abdicate truth, justice, decency or honour, for the sake of suppressing error and vice, or for defending, or prop-

agating Christian truth and righteousness. This is to commit sin ourselves in the support and under the mask of holiness; it is to stab religion with the very weapons we employ in its defence. Hence Job condemns such conduct in language of mingled surprize and detestation. "Will ye speak wickedly for GOD? Or talk deceitfully for him?" Prudence must likewise temper the *degree* of our zeal and its *mode of operation.* Though both our end and means be of the best kind; yet the flame of our passions, when wrought up to a high pitch, will greatly endanger both ourselves and our cause, unless Christian discretion guard our temper and conduct. Hence the apostle reproves the zeal of the Corinthians, even in the exercise of their extraordinary spiritual gifts, because, for want of wise regulation, it produced great disorder in their religious assemblies; such as one speaking in an unknown tongue, a second singing, a third teaching, another uttering a revelation, and even their women speaking in the church: upon which he remarks, "If a stranger should come in among you, will he not say, ye are mad?". And proceeds to exhort them, and through them all succeeding Christians; "Let all your things be done to edifying;" "let all things be done decently and in order."

THIRDLY. Zeal must ever be accompanied with *charity.* Charity or love, considered in its due extent, is the principal and most lovely grace of Christianity; and all religion is nothing without it. It must not therefore be injured or sacrificed on every little occasion. It must not be violated on *any* occasion, merely to gratify our own humour or passions. We are commanded to follow peace with all men, and to give up every thing but truth and holiness for the sake of pleasing and edifying our brethren. In short, as true zeal is but the fire

of love, the ardour of Christian benevolence; so when it is pointed even against dangerous error, against scandalous and destructive wickedness, it assumes a mild and composed, a tender and compassionate air, and thus discovers a warm affection to the person of the heretic or transgressor, a pungent grief for his sin and danger, and an earnest desire of his reformation and welfare, while it faithfully testifies against his fatal principles and conduct. Both prudence and charity demand the most kind and tender treatment, even of the most bitter enemies to gospel truth and holiness; since this is the only promising method of rescuing them from their present dangerous condition. Besides, it is a shocking incongruity to display an angry, overbearing or persecuting zeal in defending and enforcing those Christian doctrines and duties, which breathe nothing but love and peace, which reveal the astonishing benevolence and grace of GOD, and inculcate a corresponding temper on man! Such an ungracious zeal for the doctrines of grace is self contradictory and self condemned; it proves its possessors to be strangers to the hearty belief and vital influence of these doctrines, and of course ranks them in the black catalogue of practical infidels and hypocrites.

This leads us to add, that as true religious zeal originates in right affections of heart; so it always begins its reformation at home. The subject of it first casts the beam from his own eye: his first and highest indignation is pointed against his own faults, and is vigorously exerted for his personal correction and moral improvement. It is absurd to imagine that a person can truly hate sin in others, if he fondly cherishes or spares it in himself; or that he can earnestly seek the amendment and welfare of his neighbour or the public, if he have no regard to his own. But when a man is properly zeal-

ous at home, he will, by natural consequence, extend his charity abroad. He will be zealous of good works, both in himself and others. True benevolence joined with piety will quicken his zeal, both against the sin, and for the happiness of all around. David was grieved, yea, poured out rivers of tears, when he beheld transgressors. Lot was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked Sodomites. Paul's spirit was inflamed within him, at the sight of Athenian idolatry. The church of Ephesus is commended for not being able to bear them that are evil, and for trying and excommunicating false hearted professors. Our Saviour himself with holy severity drove the money changers out of the temple, and thus verified that prophetic passage, "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." In conformity to these examples, true zeal will prompt the most earnest, yet prudent efforts for the instruction and reformation, for the present and everlasting interests of mankind.

Having explained the nature of the duty enjoined, we shall now illustrate the *obligations*, which urge us to practise it.

First, the importance of religion deserves this zeal. If natural and revealed religion be true, it it the greatest and most interesting of all truths, and therefore merits our most zealous regard. If there be a GOD, as natural religion teaches, he is certainly the most glorious and perfect of all beings, and sustains the most important relations to us. Now is it fit that we should treat such a Being with cold indifference? That we should feel and express no warm emotion of love, gratitude, and veneration towards supreme, original beauty, goodness and greatness? Is it not reasonable that we should admire consummate wisdom, reverence omnipotent

power, fear and confide in impartial justice, tempered with infinite mercy, gratefully adore unbounded beneficence, constantly imitate and delight in perfect moral rectitude and glory; that we should studiously seek the friendship, and avoid the displeasure of a Being, whose favour is life, and whose anger is death? If GOD be our Supreme Father, ought we not to pay him the highest tokens of filial regard? If he be our Ruler and Judge, ought we not to yield him our cordial subjection and zealous obedience? Should it not be our main concern to obtain his final approving sentence? To be zealous in our regards to the Deity, is the first dictate of reason and moral propriety; but to treat the important character, relations, and approbation of such a Being, with unfeeling neglect, is the greatest inconsistency, madness, and wickedness, which rational creatures can commit.

Again, the revealed perfections, offices, and benefits of JESUS CHRIST, loudly claim our pious and grateful zeal. To believe JESUS CHRIST to be the Son of God, and yet trample him under our feet; to own him as our divine Prophet, and yet despise his instructions; our great High Priest, and yet undervalue his atoning blood; our divine King; and yet neglect or insult his authority and laws; our only and all sufficient Saviour, and yet conduct as if we did not need, or could not safely trust his mediation; what shocking incongruities are these! Yet this is the true picture of the lukewarm professor of Christianity! He believes that CHRIST has exhibited the greatest love to sinful and wretched man, that ever was known; yet he feels no returns of love, no ardent sentiments of gratitude to this Philanthropist! He can heartily esteem and thank a generous friend, who has made great exertions or sacrifices for his happiness;

he can almost adore the disinterested patriot, who has worn out his life in the service of his country; yet he regards with indifference that great Friend of souls, who was nailed to the cross for his own rebellious creatures, and submitted to immense labour, humiliation, and sufferings for their salvation! Can any thing be more absurd and abominable than this? Do not such miracles of condescending and expensive love, as the gospel displays, demand the most ardent and admiring gratitude? Yes,

"Passion is reason, transport temper here."

Further, That future, eternal state of retribution, which religion reveals, challenges our zealous attention. To believe in a future happiness reserved for the righteous, a happiness large as our utmost capacities and wishes, and lasting as our immortal spirits; to believe also in a contrasted state of misery of equal intenseness and duration, destined for the finally impenitent; and yet practically to regard both the one and the other as consummate trifles; to estimate the momentary pleasures and pains of a dying life, above the perfect joys and sorrows of eternity, is certainly the most prodigious inconsistency and madness! Those Christian professors, who act in this manner, do either really believe in these future scenes, or they do not. If the latter, they are not only inexcusably blind and hardened infidels, who have resisted the clear light of reason, conscience, and revelation, but they are likewise guilty of trifling both with GOD and man, by a mock profession, which is contradicted by their sentiments, as well as their practice. If the former, they are still more inconsistent and monstrous; for they believe and trifle; while the very devils believe and tremble. Surely endless, inconceivable blessedness and misery are sufficiently important to require the most

solemn, earnest, unremitted attention of those, who must quickly inherit the one or the other!

As the leading doctrines of religion, so its various duties demand our utmost zeal. The offices of piety, which we owe to God and his Son, should be animated with the greatest warmth and vigour of affection. Reason as well, as revelation requires us to love him with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; to fear and trust, to worship and obey him, with the greatest possible reverence and delight; to mention his glorious name with awful admiration; to read and hear his word with an esteem, love, and submission becoming the majesty of the Author, and the greatness of the Master; to confess our sins to him with the deepest contrition; to beg his forgiving and saving mercy with fervent importunity; and to celebrate his benefits with the most lively thankfulness. Reason and Scripture also demand, that our relative and moral duties, our works of justice and charity be performed in good earnest, in the exercise of that hearty and zealous love to our neighbour, which regards him, as another self, and seeks his good, as our own. In a word, zeal in religious and moral duties constitutes their very life; for as the essence of virtue lies in fervent love to GOD and man, it follows, that a cold, indifferent temper destroys the very spirit both of piety and morality, and turns them into a mere carcase without the soul. Hence the Scriptures constantly describe the Christian life, as one continued effort of laborious zeal; as a race, a fight, an agony; which leads us to observe,

Secondly, That as the excellence and importance of religion deserve our zeal, so the difficulties attending it render this zeal absolutely necessary. The service is so arduous, attended with so many self-denying duties,

and with such various, powerful, and discouraging opposition; that, unless we possess a large fund of holy zeal and vigour, we shall be apt to tire, despond, and give over the conflict. A deliberate, confirmed zeal must furnish the weapons and sinews of this spiritual warfare. Under its animating and fortifying influence we must run, and not be weary; and walk, and not faint.

Thirdly. We can have no comforting evidence of our own sincerity, without a becoming fervour in religion. For where the object is so great and momentous, a sincere concern about it must imply zealous regard; of course the want, or even decay of this must destroy, or at least darken our religious evidences and prospects, and check the delightful consciousness of our Christian integrity.

Fourthly. Our usefulness to the Christian cause and to the best interests of mankind depends on our compliance with the precept before us. If religious professors are not zealous in their holy calling, instead of properly exemplifying and recommending Christianity, they will hold it up to the world in a suspicious, if not contemptible light, and give occasion for the belief, that they themselves secretly reject and despise it. Thus, instead of promoting, they will obstruct the faith and happy influence of religion among their fellow-men. But a uniform, well tempered zeal in their profession at once evinces to beholders their own sincere and enlightened attachment to it; displays to their view the reality, the beauty, and moral efficacy of its doctrines and precepts; while it directly prompts the most assiduous endeavours to make them truly good and happy; and thus in various methods advances the interest and honour of the gospel and its divine Author.

Fifthly. The examples of the best of men in every age, of all the holy prophets, apostles, and martyrs, of

the blessed angels, yea of God, of Christ, and the Holy Spirit urge us to be zealous. They call upon us to emulate their sacred ardour, and thus successfully co-operate with them in the most glorious, and benevolent cause. To use the words of a very eminent British courtier, "Ah, my friends, while we laugh and trifle, all things are serious around us. GOD is serious in calling and bearing with us. Christ is serious, who shed his blood for us. The Holy Ghost is serious, who striveth against the obstinacy of our hearts. The Holy Scriptures bring to our ears the most serious things in the world. The holy sacraments represent the most awful and affecting matters. The whole creation is zealous in serving God and us. All nature is full of ardent energy and exertion, is in constant labour and travail for our happiness. All, that are in heaven or hell, are seriously engaged. How then can we sleep and trifle?" we, for whose sake this universal zeal is expended!

Finally. Our opportunities for zealous and useful activity are very short and uncertain; yet these opportunities are our only seed-time for eternity. Since then the time of life and exertion is flying; since death is hastening; since funeral knells are continually calling; shall we not eagerly improve our precious, but fleeting moments in the great business, for which we were made and redeemed, and on which infinite consequences are suspended?

Our subject, in the review, may serve to explain and enforce the important use of the passions in religion. For it has been shown, that Christian zeal, which is the soul both of piety and virtue, is nothing else, than the due and ardent exercise of the affections upon their highest objects. Consequently, to exclude the affections from our spiritual affairs upon the idea, that religion is a reasonable service, is equally absurd, unscriptural, and

pernicious. Perhaps the Christians of former ages laid too much stress upon a severe and superstitious strictness in the duties of morality; upon mechanical and enthusiastic fervours and raptures in religion; and many substituted these in the room of substantial virtue and godliness. But from this extravagant or perverted use of religious zeal in preceding ages it would be wrong to infer, as some of the present generation seem disposed to do, that the passions ought to be wholly shut out from the Christian life, and that piety and virtue, in order to be rational, must consist merely in the cold approbation and the decent external performance of duty. Certainly the passions, considered as an original part of our constitution, are not in their own nature either unreasonable or useless; but greatly the reverse. Nor can it be justly said, that the objects of religion do not deserve the homage, or its duties and difficulties require the aid of our affections; for the reverse of both is loudly proclaimed by reason and Scripture, as we have seen in this discourse. Nor can it be truly asserted, that the passions are too mean and gross a part of our frame to be a suitable and acceptable oblation on the altar of religion; for that pious fervour, which we now advocate, is something unspeakably more noble, than those unmeaning and tumultuous animal emotions, which visible objects frequently excite, or which religious considerations sometimes produce in persons of warm constitutions. It is nothing else, than the strong exercise of mental or spiritual affections, such as love, gratitude, hope, confidence, and joy towards the invisible, the infinite Parent and Redeemer of the world; affections, which, far from terminating in short-lived mechanical transports, manifest their rational origin and quality, their sincerity and strength by their permanent and universal influence upon the temper and conduct.

Surely this employment of our affections is the most worthy and acceptable homage we can possibly render to the Deity; and nothing short of this deserves the name of rational piety, or even of sound morality: for the cool perception, or even the lifeless performance of what is right falls essentially short of true virtue; because it does not include the supreme affection of the heart, which, in the view both of reason and Scripture, is the great source of moral goodness. In a word, it is the main office and glory of the Christian dispensation, not to set aside or extinguish our affections, like the unnatural and barbarous system of the stoics, but to rectify their disorders, and thus to bring them back to their original end, namely, the service of God, and the moral perfection and happiness of man. Agreeably, the descriptions, the precepts, and examples of piety, held up in the Bible, constantly inculcate such a fervent, yet judicious exercise of religious affections, as we have been recommending; while the doctrines of revelation are admirably fitted to excite and promote it.

Let us throw open our minds to the influence of the apostolical precept; and especially let it be our first concern, that our hearts may steadily feel, and our conduct express those various affections, which the great and merciful discoveries of the gospel demand. Let those, who have hitherto treated these matters with careless indifference, consider the shocking impropriety of such a behaviour. Let them awake from their fatal slumbers, and earnestly seek the grace and salvation, which Christianity offers. Let Christian professors realize, how unbecoming a lukewarm temper is in so sacred a profession. Let them abhor the thought of a timid or treacherous neutrality at a time, when the name and interest of their blessed Master are openly blasphemed and powerfully

opposed. Let them resolve, at such a crisis, to be either constant, exemplary Christians, or avowed infidels.

Let those of us, who either are, or propose at some future period to be, public Christian instructers, deeply imbibe and assiduously cultivate the Christian spirit. Such persons are eminently bound to be zealous friends to religion themselves. To use the words of a masterly writer on this subject,* "It is of the utmost consequence, that a speaker in the pulpit firmly believe both the truth and importance of those principles, which he inculcates on others; not only, that he believes them speculatively, but have a lively and serious feeling of them. This will give an earnestness and strength, a fervour of piety to his exhortations, superior in its effects to all the arts of studied eloquence; and, without it, the assistance of art will seldom be able to conceal the mere declaimer. This will make his discourses solid, cogent, and useful; it will prevent those ostentatious harangues, which have no other aim, than to amaze an audience, or raise their admiration of the speaker." I cannot forbear adding, that, as open dissipation or profligacy in a young member at the university, who afterwards becomes a preacher, must give a lasting wound to his reputation, comfort, and usefulness in that profession, as was largely shown to us, the last LORD'S day; so a theological student, who, with the sacred desk in his eye, has so little virtuous zeal, as to be afraid or ashamed to bear the least testimony against irregularity, vice, or even irreligion in his fellow students, affords a poor presage of that independent integrity, courage, and ardour in reproving sin, and promoting the cause of holiness, which are leading traits in the faithful and useful minister of the gospel.

* Dr. Blair.

Finally. To awaken and keep alive in all our bosoms the holy zeal now inculcated, let us maintain a constant and familiar intercourse with the great objects and incitements of it. Let serious meditation and devotion accompany a regular and affectionate attendance on all the institutions of our holy religion.

I shall close with briefly pressing the duties before us on all classes of my hearers. Let holy zeal and energy animate all the various pursuits, to which you are called. Let the duties, even of your secular callings, be performed with serious diligence. Remember, that the highest as well, as lowest grades in human society are bound to fill up their time and rank in the community with some kind of useful and zealous industry; and those, who think themselves above this obligation, would do well to consider that dreadful sentence, "Cast ye the slothful, unprofitable servant into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth." Let parents and governors of families, while they reflect on their solemn and arduous trust, be incited to discharge it in the most earnest, yet prudent and tender manner. Let the words of GOD, the instructions of religion and virtue be continually in our hearts and mouths; and let us teach them diligently to our children, talking of them when we sit in our houses, when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we arise up. Let neighbours and friends endeavour with prudent zeal to enlighten, reclaim, establish, or comfort their ignorant or ungodly, their erroneous, wavering, or disconsolate brethren. Let those, who are distinguished by their talents and wealth, their power and influence, be as rich and zealous in good works, as they are eminent in useful ability. Let unrenewed, impenitent sinners awake from their fatal slumbers, and earnestly seek divine mercy and salvation. Let me address each of them, as the mariners

did Jonah. "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God; if so be that God will think upon thee, that thou perish not." If endless bliss or wo be of any importance to thee, rouse from thy careless indolence; consider and bewail thy sin and misery; look out for the needful and appointed remedy; cry mightily to the divine Saviour for his reconciling, restoring grace; never rest, till thy soul has sensibly received the transcript of God's law, the impression of Christ's gospel, and thus the image and friendship of thy Creator and Redeemer.

Let Christian professors realize, that nothing can be more unbecoming, disgraceful, or pernicious, than a lukewarm temper in so sacred a profession. Let them therefore resolve to be either cold or hot; zealous Christians, or consistent avowed infidels.

Let declining, or doubting saints penitently return to their former zeal, and to their first works. Let them diligently search the Scriptures and their own hearts; and in every suitable and prescribed method wait earnestly, yet patiently and submissively on God for renewed animation and comfort in the religious life.

Finally. Let Christians in general carry a spirit of holy zeal into all the duties, which they owe to themselves, to their fellow men, and to their God. To this end let each one bring home to his heart such questions as these. Can I do no more, than this, for that Being, who gave and deserves my all, and who has shown me infinite favour? Can I do no more, for my Saviour, who died and endured so much, so patiently and generously for me? Can I do no more, when my own eternal salvation is the prize? Can I do no more for my neighbours, friends, children; for the church of my blessed Master? Can I do no more, who have loitered so long, who am now perhaps doing my last; who have

so many encouragements and helps; so many mercies to draw, and afflictions to rouse me; who chose such a Master, such a work, and such a reward? Let us plead these questions with our own hearts and with our Maker; till we duly feel their quickening power; till we become as a flame of fire in the service of God and our generation.

## Sermon II.

# On brotherly Reproof.

LEVITICUS XIX. 17.

*Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.*

IT is a subject of just and general complaint, that honest and faithful friendship in our mutual communications and dealings is become very unfashionable; and a style of flattery and dissimulation has crept into our ordinary social intercourse; insomuch that the good old practice of generously pointing out, and endeavouring to rectify, the errors and faults of our neighbour, is in a great measure lost, even among Christian professors.

As this instance of modern degeneracy is both sinful and pernicious, it is the duty of religious instructers to bear an open testimony against it, and to enforce this testimony by their private and public example.

The words just recited are excellently adapted to such a design, as they earnestly inculcate the duty of reproving our offending brethren. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him."

Several things in this precept deserve our particular notice.

First. We are commanded rather to reprove our neighbour openly, than to cherish secret hatred against

him for any injury or offence, which he has offered to us. We are forbidden to "hate him in our hearts," that is, to conceive secret disaffection to him, and conceal resentful, vindictive passions under the veil of silence, or apparent friendship, till we have a full opportunity of retaliating. But we must rather give vent to our honest displeasure at the offence, by dealing openly and faithfully with the offender. In this way we must endeavour to convince him of his fault, and thus extinguish our own resentment. We must rebuke him to his face, for any flagrant evil, in opposition both to divulging his transgression to others, like mean and cruel talebearers (which is strictly prohibited in the preceding verse;) and to basely flattering, encouraging, or justifying him in his sin.

Secondly. We are thus to reuke him, in a spirit of love. For the duty of reproof being here opposed to inward hatred of our brother, implies of course the contrary affection of love, prompting our efforts to convince and reform him, and thus secure his forgiveness, virtue, and final happiness. Friendly rebuke then is an essential office of mutual charity, which ought both to be performed and received in love. "Let the righteous smite me," said an eminent saint, "and it shall be a kindness." How faithful and salutary are these wounds of a friend!

Thirdly. Observe the great strictness of the command; "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke him;" that is, thou shalt, by no means, on no pretence, omit this friendly office; which denotes, that however ready men are to frame reasons for neglecting it, none of those excuses will by any means annul the binding force of this duty, or exculpate the omission. For observe,

Fourthly, The great guilt and mischief incurred by such neglect. It is here construed into hatred of our brother, and suffering sin upon him; that is, suffering him to

be under the guilt of a sin, from which our kind and seasonable reproof might instrumentally save him. Or the words might be rendered, "and," or "so thou shalt not bear sin for him," or on his account; that is, thou shalt not involve thyself in his guilt, as thou certainly wilt do, if thou dost not take this method to reform him. If we reprove not the unfruitful works of darkness, we have fellowship with them, and become partakers in their guilt.

The text, thus explained, compared with similar passages of scripture, and with those great principles of nature and Christianity, which require us to love our fellow men, as ourselves, and promote their best interests by every suitable method in our power, sufficiently evinces, that mutual reproof of failings and sins in each other is an important social duty. We are all as much bound to perform this office to an offending brother, as we are to awake our neighbour from sleep, when his house is in flames, or to admonish him of his danger and urge him to repel it, when we see him attacked by a malignant disease. That modish civility or prudence, which pretends not to see, or seeing will not reprove, the faults of others, argues not a truly kind and tender, but a selfish, unfeeling, and unchristian spirit; a spirit, which makes private interest and ease the centre of all its actions. If all mankind, from the beginning, had been uniformly governed by this self-seeking spirit, society could not have subsisted. In other words, if no man had felt himself interested in the welfare of others as well, as his own, men either could not have united in social intercourse, or being embodied, must soon have been scattered and dissolved. Hence a cold insensibility and disregard to the moral conduct and welfare of our neighbour is a high offence against society

as well, as Christianity, and of course against that Being, who is the supreme Founder and Guardian of both; it strikes, not only at the well being of individuals, but at the existence both of the church and commonwealth.

But though all men are thus bound to seek the reformation of transgressors by faithfully reproving them; yet this duty eminently belongs to some particular classes of mankind; I mean those, who are peculiarly entrusted with the superintendence of others. All authority over others makes the governor, in some sense, accountable for the behaviour of the governed; consequently the former is as truly obliged to notice and guard the actions of the latter, as to watch over his own.

Those magistrates, parents, and instructers of youth, who neither regard nor reprove the vices of those under their care, betray a most sacred and important trust. Those civil officers are eminently guilty in this respect, whose peculiar function and solemn oath bind them to investigate and animadvert upon certain offences; who yet, in defiance of those sacred engagements, wilfully shut their eyes, their ears, and their mouths, against the most flagrant transgressions, instead of faithfully arming against them the sword both of private reproof and public justice. Those parents, too, will be called to a terrible account at last for the blood of their children, who have suffered them to perish before their eyes, only for want of telling them their sin and their danger.

Those Christian teachers likewise incur dreadful guilt, who refuse to see, or neglect to reprove, irreligious and demoralizing principles, or prevailing practical impiety and vice, especially when these evils are spreading over the Christian world. On the other hand, that minister deserves a double tribute of gratitude and

honour, especially from his own people, who is ready to risk, and even to sacrifice, his own temporal ease, profit, reputation, yea, his worldly all, rather than withhold from them such information, admonition, and reproof, as he believes in his conscience to be essential to their best interests.

Such a truly independent, magnanimous, yet benevolent spirit ought to characterize every professed disciple, especially every minister, of that self-denying Redeemer, who cheerfully sacrificed his own comfort, honour, and even life to the great business of reproving, healing, and saving a distempered, perverse, and unthankful world. This courageous and active zeal, however, by no means precludes, but rather implies, as we shall presently see, that Christian meekness and discretion, which are necessary to the acceptance and success of our faithful admonitions.

Another description of persons, to whom this duty of reproof peculiarly belongs, is the class of professed and intimate friends. Every man may justly challenge this office from his bosom associate, as an indispensable debt of friendship. For, to use the language of an eloquent writer, "To what purpose does a man take another person into his heart, so as to make him his second self, his second conscience, if the latter will not be impartial in observing, reproving, and amending his faults as well, as in applauding and improving his virtues? Can that man truly love me, can he feel toward me like a generous, confidential friend, who leaves me unwarned, unguarded, unassisted, when he sees defects and improprieties in me, which I overlook in myself, and which, if uncorrected, will injure my comfort and improvement, my reputation and usefulness? No. It is the nature of love to cover a multitude of sins;

and one instance of this is to cover them from the eyes of others, by faithfully discovering them to the offender himself, and thereby engaging him to watch over and suppress them."

Let me then earnestly recommend this expression of true friendship to all, who are united by its endearing and sacred bonds; to those, who are intimately connected by nature, by agreeable neighbourhood, by familiar association, especially by those domestic ties, which render two persons in an eminent sense one. What singular advantages and proportionate obligations are these under, particularly the last, to correct each other's failings in the most insinuating and efficacious manner, and thus to guard and improve each other in virtue, in mutual Christian affection, and happiness!

But here an important question arises, How ought this delicate task of administering reproof to be performed, so as most effectually to reach the end? I answer,

First. Let the reproof, if possible, be given in secret; for the design of it is, not to disgrace, but reform the offender. But the publication of his miscarriage tends only to exasperate and harden him in transgression. Yet such is the malignity, the imprudence, or the love of telling and hearing some new thing, which generally prevails, that a person who has committed a fault, instead of being admonished and recalled to virtue by the private and tender voice of friendship, too commonly finds himself, in the first instance, the victim of public reproach. But is this consistent with the law of Christian prudence and love, or even of common humanity? Has not our benevolent Master prescribed a very different line of conduct? Has he not expressly directed us, "If thy brother has offended thee, go and

tell him his fault between thee and him alone?" If this step succeed, the brother is gained, and his offence is to be forever buried. If this secret application fail, then "take with thee two or three witnesses."

How amiable is this process! It savours equally of tenderness to our brother's reputation and comfort in this world, and to his eternal salvation in the next. Accordingly, even the popish religion, which enjoins confession of sins to the priest, inflicts the severest penalty on him, if he divulge any thing, revealed to him in such confession. When will the protestant world learn from despised papists to practise equal prudence and charity!

Secondly. Let the style and manner of our reproofs be suited to the rank and condition of the reproved. If an inferior be called to reprove a superior, let him manifest the same deference and submission on this occasion, as in the most direct and solemn expressions of respect. Even truth, unseasonably or disrespectfully delivered, especially in cases of rebuke, usually irritates, instead of curing, men's vicious passions. It leads them to hate truth and virtue, on account of the forbidding garb, in which they appear. In this case the reprover is really a partaker in the sin of the offender; because he directly confirms him in it. With what modesty and delicacy did Daniel reprove king Belshazzar, a most insolent, debauched, and sacrilegious prince, who had just profaned the sacred vessels of God's sanctuary at a licentious feast; yet instead of reproaching him in rough and bitter language, he calmly recounts to him the signal mercies and judgments of Heaven upon his father Nebuchadnezzar, and then gently adds, "And thou, his son, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this." Such

a discreet and respectful manner recommended both his person and his admonition. Let all reprovers, both public and private, imitate this lovely example. Let them seek, by a prudent and respectful mode of address, to insinuate needful reproof into the affections of men, and thus to give it desirable success; which brings me to add,

Thirdly, Rebuke must be dispensed in a meek and compassionate manner. Nothing can be more unbecoming and cruel, than haughty, sarcastic, or insulting treatment of a guilty brother, which seems to triumph in his pain and confusion. The spirit of Christian charity forbids all scurrilous reflections on the person reproved, and every needless aggravation of his offence. It requires us to probe his wound with the hand of tender pity, as those who participate in the distress, which duty and love compel us to inflict, and who wish to excite no more anguish, than the real necessity and benefit of the patient demand. We have an excellent model of this compassionate manner of reproving in the prophet Nathan, when sent to admonish David of his shocking guilt in the affair of Uriah. Instead of directly painting, in strong and aggravated colours, the crimes of adultery and murder, he imperceptibly steals into David's conscience and heart, by the nicest arts of gentle address. By reciting a most apposite and moving parable he leads the guilty monarch insensibly to pronounce his own condemnation. Having thus brought him to confess his sin, he adds not one severe word to heighten his affliction, but hastens to comfort him with an assurance of divine forgiveness, seconded, however, by a kind but faithful warning; "The Lord has put away thy sin, thou shalt not die,—Howbeit, as by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," thy infant son, the

offspring of thy crime, "shall surely die." How tender, yet how effectual, was this manner of dealing!

This compassionate style of reproof is ever connected with a humbling sense of our own guilt and remaining depravity, and a thankful acknowledgment of that divine grace, which has preserved us from the same or even greater vices, than those, which we reprove in others. This humility and pious gratitude will prevent us from looking down upon offenders, as the proud Pharisee did on the poor Publican, with a boasting, vain glorious air; and will lead us to adore the distinguishing mercy of God in keeping, or delivering us from those temptations, by which others have fallen.

Fourthly. Reproof must not be continued or repeated, after the occasion is removed by the reformation of the offender. When our guilty brother repents, he ought to be forgiven; and, if we forgive a crime, we ought to forget it; that is, to feel and behave, as if we had forgotten it, in a friendly and respectful manner, as we treat those, who have never offended us.

If those, who call themselves Christians, would diligently discharge the duty before us, in the manner now recommended, they would evidence and promote their brotherly love to the best advantage. Their admonitions, for the most part, would be kindly received, and would frequently, by the divine blessing, produce the desired effect. Such faithful reprovers would, at least, preserve their own souls from sharing the guilt and ruin of their offending brethren; and would possess unspeakable comfort and benefit in the present approbation and improvement of their own minds, and in the final applause and recompense of their Judge.

Let these considerations prevail on you, my brethren, to comply in good earnest with the precept of the text. Remember that it forbids you, on any pre-

tence, or for any reason whatever, to omit this humane and benevolent office. Be entreated then to banish the excuses, and to remove the causes, which obstruct or mar your performance of this duty.

Some of you are perhaps deterred from reproving others, by a consciousness that you are equally guilty yourselves. You cannot with any spirit or confidence press those duties upon your neighbours, or even your own children, which you yourselves secretly or openly neglect. You cannot rebuke them for sin, when you commit the same, or equal transgressions. You have not courage, by attempting to reform them, to expose yourselves to that cutting retort, "Physician, heal thyself." Those parents, rulers, or masters, those Christian professors and teachers, may well be afraid and ashamed to reprove and exhort others, who are not religiously careful of their own temper and conduct; for the admonitions of such can have little authority, acceptance, or utility. All of us, therefore, especially those, who are appointed to watch over others, have a double motive to attend to ourselves, since without this attention we can neither save ourselves, nor usefully perform our duty to mankind, but directly contribute to the destruction of both. Let our charity, then, begin at home, in the thorough conversion and genuine integrity of our own hearts and lives. Then, our experience and example will give energy to our endeavours for the reformation of others.

Again, some of you are probably hindered from the performance of this duty by a desire of pleasing, and a fear of offending men. But though the favour of those around us be a desirable good, both in itself and its effects, and the contrary be an equal evil; yet it is certainly our duty and interest to please God, rather than men. To please men for their good to edification is

true Christian benevolence; but to please them to their destruction is base and savage cruelty.

Another hindrance to this duty is an excessive constitutional tenderness, which will not suffer us to give pain to a fellow creature, even on the most urgent occasions. Thus the tender feelings of some parents will not permit them to curb the extravagant humours and passions of their children, or to administer the most needful correction, or even reproof. The same principle withholds many neighbours and friends from bearing proper testimony against the follies and vices of each other. But a tenderness, which thus restrains persons from a necessary duty, instead of being an amiable and useful virtue, degenerates into a cowardly and pernicious vice.

Another great hindrance to this duty is shame, or a dread of reproach and ridicule. But if the servants of Satan are not ashamed of their master, shall the disciples of Christ blush to stand up for theirs? If the former are not ashamed to swear, to riot, to trample upon the Sabbath and worship of God; shall the latter be ashamed to reprove such daring abominations? If infidels and libertines proclaim their wicked and destructive principles and practices with an unblushing, and even exulting countenance; shall not serious Christian believers be at least equally bold in testifying against these evils, and endeavouring to reform them? Does it not become them to manifest a noble superiority to the jeers and mockings, which a faithful discharge of their duty may draw upon them from ignorant or abandoned men? In short, let us all remember, that there is no dishonour in being censured or ridiculed, but in deserving to be so; that it is a real glory to be reproached for our distinguished Christian courage and zeal; but that, "if we are ashamed of Christ

and his words before an adulterous generation, he will be ashamed of us before his Father, and before his angels."

Another impediment to this duty is an indolent disposition, or such a love of personal ease and quiet, as cannot relish or endure laborious and persevering efforts for the reformation and salvation of others; especially as those efforts often provoke the most unthankful and malevolent returns. But to excuse ourselves from this generous, though self-denying office, on this ground, betrays a vile preference of present self-indulgence to the will and honour of God, and the highest good of our fellow-creatures.

Near akin to this is that exclusive devotion to our own interest, which shuts out all feeling or care for the welfare of others, and prompts us to ask with wicked and murderous Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Let my neighbour take care of himself. But it is sufficient to reply, We are all charged by God, by nature, and Christianity, with the care of our brother as well, as of ourselves; and consequently we cannot neglect his welfare, without endangering and finally destroying our own.

Pride is also a frequent source of this neglect. I mean that pride, which disdains the humble office of familiarly instructing, exhorting, and reproving the poor, ignorant, and baser classes of mankind. But such haughty, pretended Christians forget how low their Master stooped for them; how he descended from the bosom and throne of God to mingle and converse with the dregs of mankind, with a view to reform and save them.

Ignorance is another cause of this neglect. Some are ignorant, that the business of mutual reproof is a common Christian duty, or at least is their duty; es-

pecially as they are conscious of such weakness of judgment and knowledge, or such want of eloquence, as in their view unfits them for this office. But every man, however weak and unlearned, has some influence over others, especially over his equals and inferiors. He may, at least, admonish and rebuke them by the eloquence of his looks and example, which in many cases would have a salutary and lasting effect.

This duty is likewise often obstructed by a spirit of discouragement and despondency, which tempts even good people to give over admonishing stupid and obstinate sinners, and no longer to cast pearls before swine. But we ought to remember, that so long, as there is life, there is some ground of hope; that so long, as sinners will hear, we have some encouragement to speak; that no person, however hardened, is beyond the reach of divine power and mercy; and that since God works by suitable means, it is our duty to continue our exhortations and reproofs, hoping and praying for a divine blessing to attend them. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand;" for thou knowest not but this good seed may at length take root, and spring up into a plentiful harvest.

Finally, some neglect this duty from a mistaken idea, that the office of reproving vice belongs exclusively to the Christian priesthood. But though public instruction and admonition belong to Christian preachers only, yet it equally belongs to Christians at large to co-operate with their ministers by mutual private exhortations. These would greatly encourage and strengthen your public instructers, and would give double advantage and effect both to their public and private addresses; but the neglect of this duty among Christian professors depresses and disables ministers from prosecuting their work with desirable spirit and success. In short,

the negligence, or the faithful zeal of a Christian people and their ministers is mutually contagious; like the electric fluid it is quickly communicated from one to the other.

Since, then, we find ourselves stripped of every plea for omitting the duty before us, what remains but that we awake to the immediate and resolute practice of it? Have we not already, by our sinful neglect, been partakers of the guilt, and accessary to the ruin of others; perhaps of our own beloved children or dearest friends? And are there not multitudes around us of open transgressors and scoffing infidels as well, as of cold or sleeping Christians, whose situation demands the friendly aid of our admonitions and prayers? Can we have the faith of Christians, if we do not view such persons in a hazardous and very pitiable condition?

Can we possibly account for the careless spirit of many nominal believers at this day, both with respect to their own moral conduct and state, and those of others; can we account for it on any other principle, than that of secret infidelity with regard to the great truths of revelation? If men fully believe any very interesting proposition or fact, it will influence their feelings and practice. This is universally seen in their temporal affairs. Accordingly we are told, that Noah was moved by his faith to prepare an ark for himself and his house, and to warn a sinful and sleeping world of their danger. Why did not the world hearken to, and comply with his admonitions? Because they did not, like him, believe the divine threatening. Agreeably, multitudes of professed Christians at this degenerate period have only a traditional, uncertain, or at best probable opinion, that the Bible may be true; but have no steady and thorough conviction of the certainty and import of its interesting doctrines and precepts, threatenings and promises. If

they had, they would be all sensibility and exertion in securing and promoting their own best interests, and those of their families, neighbours, and fellow creatures at large. We have all, therefore, very great reason to adopt that prayer of the disciples, "Lord, increase our faith."

While we labour and pray for a more strong and operative faith, let us with equal assiduity cherish a mutual Christian benevolence and sympathy. I mean that benevolence, which deeply feels, and strives to remove the moral as well, as physical evils, which have invaded our country or vicinity; that benevolence, which principally laments, and seeks to extirpate the fashionable infidelity, irreligion, and vices of the age, and which exerts its main efforts to produce a general revival of Christian piety and morals. While we glory in the liberal and benevolent character of the present times, let not this liberal and beneficent spirit be confined merely to men's bodies and political interests; as though we were a set of beings, who were to expire with the beasts, and had never so much as heard of a future state. Let not our benevolent candour be perverted into a fond or silent indulgence of our children and neighbours in every pernicious error, folly, or vice. But let us remember that our text, and indeed the whole spirit of our religion, stigmatize this species of candour, as a real and cruel hatred of our fellow creatures.

Let us then shew our philanthropy by more Christian and more substantial tokens; by doing all in our power to bring those around us, especially our own families and intimate friends to believe, love, and obey the gospel. In conformity to the express and frequent injunctions of Christianity, let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works. Let us "exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

## Sermon III.

# On secret Faults and presumptuous Sins.

PSALM xix. 12, 13.

*Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.*

*Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Then shall I be upright; and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.*

THESE words present to view a moral scale, or a gradual ascent of iniquity. The lowest degree of this series is *error*, or secret infirmity; the next, *presumptuous sin;* the highest is called the great transgression.

I propose to define these several grades of sin, especially the two first; and subjoin such remarks, as may seem pertinent and useful.

The ground of the distinction here made between *error* and *presumption* lies in the constitution of our natures. There are in the human mind three prime sources of action, the understanding, the will, and the affections. If there were no blindness in the first, no perversity in the second, and no disturbance in the last, our actions would all be perfect. But alas! in our present state, these several faculties are strongly infected with the appropriate disorders just named. Hence most of our wrong exercises have a tincture of each. But in philosophical strictness, every sin must be denominated from its principal source. If it chiefly result from a mis-

judging or uninformed understanding, it is a sin of ignorance; if it proceed from a sudden perturbation of the passions, it is a sin of infirmity; if it flow from a cool and obstinate determination of the will, it is a presumptuous offence. I will illustrate each of these by an eminent scripture example.

Paul's conduct in persecuting the church of Christ proceeded directly from a misguided judgment; from a full, though erroneous, persuasion, that Christianity was a pernicious heresy, fabricated to overturn the divine religion of Moses. His passions were not violently inflamed against the Christians by any personal provocations. His will did not boldly defy his understanding and conscience. We must therefore seek for the immediate cause of his wrong action in mental error; and accordingly must style his persecution a sin of ignorance. Under this name he himself condemns it: "I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly."

Our next illustration shall be taken from the fall of Peter. His denial of his Master did not arise from want of information. He had intimately known and amply confessed the divine character of Jesus. He knew and felt himself sacredly bound to own and adhere to him in every extremity. He had solemnly pledged himself to do it. The plea of ignorance therefore vanishes. Yet, on the other hand, his fault was not strictly a presumptuous sin; because it was not done with deliberate design or previous malice. He came to the fatal spot with a contrary intention. His heart loved and honoured his Master, even while his tongue abjured him; and no sooner did the signal, foretold by his Lord, arrest his ear, than it roused the deepest penitential sorrow in his bosom. These circumstances remove from his offence every suspicion of obstinate resolution, and oblige us to resort to his passions for the true spring of his miscon-

duct. A sudden emotion of fear prevented the exercise both of his reason and virtue, and carried his whole soul to one point, namely, how to avoid the present danger. His denial was therefore a sin of infirmity.

But the conduct of David in the affair of Uriah widely differed from both the cases just cited. It was the wilful murder of an innocent, brave, and faithful subject; a murder leisurely predetermined, artfully contrived and covered, and very basely accomplished; and all this by a person of superior knowledge and sensibility with respect to right and wrong, to duty and sin. This action therefore has no plea either of mistake or surprise. It was a high instance of presumptuous wickedness.

These examples compared suggest the following observations.

I. That no ignorance or mistake respecting plain and essential things can wholly excuse an erroneous conduct; because such ignorance is in some degree voluntary, or the fruit of human depravity. It arises, not from a total want of the requisite means of information, but from faulty inattention and prejudice; or from a heart, which loves the darkness of error and vice rather, than the pure light of truth and virtue. A misguided judgment, produced by such causes, implies crime; and therefore cannot justify the actions, to which it leads. Agreeably, Paul, after his conversion, condemns that very conduct, which before he verily thought to be right. This self-condemnation was founded in a conviction, that his former mistake arose, in a great measure, from unreasonable prejudice, from a voluntary neglect of those means of knowledge, which had been placed before him. The same remark still more emphatically applies to the Jewish rulers and people, who condemned and crucified our Saviour. At the time of committing these enormities, they appear to have viewed him as

an impostor and blasphemer, who ought to be executed. Yet no one doubts their heinous guilt in this proceeding. The reason is obvious. Their malignant depravity blinded their understandings. It made them resist the abundant evidence, which Jesus had given, of his divine mission.

These remarks place in their true light the first class of sins above described. They show, that ignorance and mistake, unless they be invincible, or absolutely unavoidable, will never exculpate a forbidden action. They consequently enforce the duty of confessing, with the Psalmist, those numerous *errors*, or secret faults, into which even good men are often betrayed by inconsideration, or remaining corruption. At the same time,

II. Though ignorance may not justify, yet it frequently extenuates transgression. A person, who commits an offence, without knowing or considering at the time its evil nature and tendency, is certainly in that instance a less daring and aggravated offender, than he, who performs the same act in defiance of present knowledge and conviction. Agreeably, our Saviour tells us, that he, who disobeys his Lord's will, while he does not fully know it, shall be beaten with few stripes; while he, who knows it, and yet does not prepare himself to do it, shall be beaten with many stripes. He also made this plea for his very murderers; "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." This plea however will be of little service to those, who resolutely wrap up their minds in ignorance or delusion, on purpose, that they may sin with greater freedom and boldness. Such wilful and studied delusion is itself a presumptuous sin. This leads us to observe,

III. That many things, which our self-flattering minds are ready to pronounce infirmities, or undesigned errors, belong to a higher species of guilt. If a man, un-

der sudden and violent provocation, conceives an angry thought or revengeful desire; if he utters his hasty feelings in unguarded expressions; such thought, desire, and language, if soon checked, may be denominated infirmities. But, if a man frequently indulges such passionate emotions and words, or some other folly, which easily besets him, under an idea, that they are small inadvertences; if he often rushes into those companies, or situations, which tend to excite and confirm these irregularities; if, after committing them, he studiously lessens, excuses, or hides their deformity by ascribing them to some laudable motive, to some innocent weakness, or to the sudden influence of passion, of company, or of example; in each of these cases he makes himself a presumptuous offender; he cherishes a fault, which he ought to combat; he shows a perverse fondness for transgression; he commits and persists in it from a stupid insensibility to the evil of sin. A small error, wilfully retained and fostered, implies and produces great guilt and depravity.

This suggests another frequent mistake on this subject. Some place in the list of infirmities all those sins, which do not break out into overt acts, and even into gross and daring offences. But both Scripture and reason assure us, that the heart is the prime subject and fountain of moral good and evil; and, of course, that the secret affections and exercises of this constitute the main part both of human virtue and vice. It follows, that a person may be a vile and presumptuous sinner, while his visible actions are decent and regular. Agreeably, we are told in the sacred writings, that a man may commit adultery, and even murder, in his heart. We are likewise told, that the carnal mind, or a heart, which is supremely set on carnal things, is enmity against God. In short, the Bible, and indeed the nature of the

thing declares, that evil thoughts and desires, when wilfully cherished in the breast, are not only presumptuous sins, but the fruitful source of every other transgression.

It is also a dangerous mistake to suppose, that every sin, committed by a true believer, or a person endued with a gracious principle, is a mere infirmity. This conclusion has been drawn by some from these words of St. John, "He, that is born of God, cannot commit sin." "That is," say these Expositors, "he cannot, like other men, sin in a cordial and deliberate manner; consequently his worst deviations are inconsiderable frailties." We grant, that sin is not his chosen and leading employment. Yet there are seasons, when the remains of corrupt disposition bear down the opposite principle, and generate inward feelings and overt actions, directly repugnant to his general character. Is it safe to assert, that these corrupt exercises are less aggravated in a child of God, than in a servant of sin? On the contrary, does not the former sin against far greater privileges and motives, than the latter? Is not the unworthy conduct of a son and a favourite far more ungrateful and monstrous, than the same deportment in a servant, or an avowed enemy? Was not the guilt of David in the affair of Uriah unspeakably enhanced by his religious profession and attainments? Let no one therefore imagine, that the guilt or the danger of his transgressions is small, because he is confident of a Christian standing. Rather let this very persuasion increase his vigilance. Let it incite him to pray more earnestly, with pious David in the text, "Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins."

IV. This leads us to specify some of the most remarkable kinds of presumptuous sin. I do this with a view to place this awful subject in the most convincing

and searching light; and to point our best efforts against such a high species of guilt, in whatever shape it may offer itself.

One form, in which this sin appears, is a violent opposition to the clear light and warnings of conscience. When the sinner's depraved inclinations, instead of being subdued, are roused to greater energy by the kind interference of this heavenly monitor; when he bursts through the strong barriers, which a full conviction of truth and duty, of guilt and danger, oppose to his progress; this is to transgress in a manner the most daring, ungrateful, and desperate. Those, who thus act, are said to resist and to quench the Spirit of God. Those likewise sin presumptuously, who boldly cast off the religious principles, impressions, and resolutions of their early years; who not only renounce, but openly deride those doctrines and duties, which they once regarded with reverence and delight. It requires no ordinary degree of presumption and outrage to stifle sentiments and feelings so natural and rational, so early and deeply impressed, and which have been found so comforting and salutary. Accordingly those, who make and succeed in this effort, justly acquire the reputation of gigantic sinners. Those also merit the same character, who relapse into those very sins, for which they have been severely chastized, and which they once bitterly lamented and solemnly abjured. It deserves remark, that neither David nor Peter ever renewed those foul crimes, of which they once repented. On the contrary, they ever regarded them with peculiar detestation and horror. The remembrance of them was a constant incentive to a humble, watchful, and exemplary life. But those, who return to the vices, which they once renounced with deep sorrow and shame, sin against nature as well, as grace; for nature teaches even the inferior

animals to shun those things, which they have found to be hurtful.

Near akin to this is the presumption of those, who harden themselves against the mercies or the judgments of the Most High; who abuse their health and competence, their wealth or power, as engines of luxury, oppression, or impiety; who continue unreformed, after, and perhaps under the scourges of personal, domestic, or national calamity; who resolutely oppose the united admonitions of God's word and providence.

Finally, to the class of wilful and obstinate offenders we must refer all those, who refuse to believe and obey the gospel, while favoured with clear and abundant evidence of its truth and importance.

This particular view of presumtuous sins suggests to us,

V. The reasons, why the Psalmist was so earnest to be restrained from committing them. The reasons may be summed up in one idea, namely, the peculiar malignity of such transgressions. They flow from cool and stubborn depravity. They blaspheme the essential attributes of God, by practically saying, either that he has not knowledge, power, and justice sufficient to punish them, or that his mercy is so easy and so undistinguishing a quality, as to pardon the most unrelenting and daring wickedness, or, at least, to accept the cheapest and latest repentance. They are likewise very pernicious in their effects. They destroy the light, the energy, and the delicate feelings of conscience. They bring a natural and judicial hardness upon the heart. They consign the soul to the absolute empire of sin. They bring it to the precipice of total apostasy and ruin. Hence David prays to be kept back from wilful sin, that so he might be innocent from the great trans-

gression, that is, from final impenitence, which cannot be forgiven.

In the review of this subject, what reason have the best of us to exclaim, in the language of David, Who can understand his errors? Who can conceive, how often and how greatly he has departed from the perfect standard of duty? Who can reckon up the improper thoughts and feelings of his mind, the unguarded sallies of his tongue, and the faulty actions of his life? Who can enumerate his neglected opportunities of doing or receiving good, of resisting or preventing evil? Who can form an accurate and complete list of the vicious mistakes of his judgment, of the irregular motions of his passions, of the wrong inclinations and purposes of his will? Who can fully state every circumstance of aggravation, which has marked each guilty defect, omission, or act of his life? Surely, my brethren, if we have any knowledge of ourselves, of the divine law, of the infinite purity and majesty of God, we shall readily adopt that humble address, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

Hence let us all unite in the prayer of the text, that GOD would cleanse us from secret faults, and keep us back from deliberate transgression. Humble and fervent prayer against sin is a natural preservative from it; as it tends to give us a solemn and habitual sense of the presence and holiness of GOD, of the evil and danger of offending him, and of the vile hypocrisy of practically contradicting our own petitions. As prayer is the appointed medium of obtaining succour from Heaven; so it solemnly binds and urges us to employ our own diligence in mortifying sin, in opposing temptation, and in practising universal holiness. Thus sincere petitions call forth corresponding exertion. Let us then unite

holy activity with humble dependence on GOD. If we would be kept back from sins of presumption and from the great transgression, let us maintain a constant reverence for the authority of conscience; let us daily and impartially inquire into the state of our hearts; let us dread and promptly subdue the first risings of sinful thought and affection; let us plant our strongest guard against favourite corruptions; let us avoid the most distant approaches, occasions, and appearances of evil; let us stop our ears, like the deaf adder, against the enchanting voice of temptation; let us shun, as we would a mortal pestilence, the society and conversation of ungodly seducers; let us say with a holy firmness, "Depart from me, ye evil doers; for I will keep the commandments of my GOD. Above all, let us see, that the fountain of moral exercises within us be purified by heavenly grace; that our souls be clad with the spiritual armour of truth and righteousness, of gospel faith and hope. Then shall we be able to stand in the evil day; yea, we shall prove more than conquerors through him, that loved us.

# Sermon IV.

## On the Love of God.

MARK xii. 30.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first and great commandment.*

AS all religion is founded in the existence, perfections, and providence of one Supreme Being, the Creator and Governor of the world; so this infinite Being must be the prime and terminating object of religion; and a supreme regard to him must be the first duty, the crowning virtue of rational creatures. Agreeably, when our Saviour was asked by a Jewish lawyer, which is the first commandment of all, he replies in the words just read; "Thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD with all thy heart;....this is the first and great commandment."

In discoursing on this very noble and interesting subject, we will endeavour to illustrate the nature, the grounds, the measure, and the superior importance of love to GOD.

With regard to the *nature* of the affection here enjoined, it must be understood to comprehend all those inward regards to the Deity, which his perfections, relations, and benefits demand. In other words, it includes the whole of piety, viewed in its internal principles, or as seated in the mind; just as love to our neighbour, required in the second great command,

comprises the whole principle of social virtue. Accordingly, the first ingredient in love to GOD is a just view and esteem of his character; for so far as we entertain false and dishonourable ideas of the Supreme Being, our regards to him will be misplaced, degrading, and idolatrous; they will really centre on a wrong object, an idol of our own imagination. It is therefore highly important, that our views of the divine character be founded in truth, that they be derived from the sacred oracles, that they present the Deity to our minds in a glorious and amiable light, in the full-orbed lustre of his natural and moral perfections. Then, and only then, shall we perceive a beauty, a transcendent dignity in his nature, which will command our rational, our superlative esteem. We may indeed possess a kind of selfish, enthusiastic love to GOD without this scriptural, impressive sight of his inherent excellence; that is, we may love him with the mercenary affection of publicans and sinners, from a flattering confidence of his special love and benefits to us, either enjoyed or expected; or a pleasing idea, that he is just such a Being, as ourselves. But this is only a reflection and refinement of self-love, and neither involves nor produces any genuine esteem of the divine character; for proper esteem of a worthy object never grows out of mere self-love, but is ever founded on the apprehended worth of the party esteemed. Which leads us to observe, that true love to God unites the heart to his glory, and consecrates all its faculties to his service. The mind, in a just view and esteem of his infinite excellence, sees it to be the noblest and happiest thing in the world to honour and please him; to contribute to the display of his glorious perfections, and the advancement of his moral kingdom. Hence its active powers and pursuits are mainly and habitually directed to this object; insomuch

that the pious lover of God eats and drinks, and does every thing to his glory. Hence too, he places his own highest delight and felicity in contemplating, serving, and imitating his Maker, and enjoying the emanations and assurances of his favour. We necessarily delight in those characters, to whom our hearts are united by sincere esteem and affection; their society, their friendship, their approving smile, their growing prosperity, afford us the highest enjoyment. By contributing to their pleasure or interest we essentially promote our own. This happily illustrates the inseparable connexion between serving God and enjoying him, in the union of which the compilers of a celebrated religious compend have wisely placed the chief end of man; for both these ideas meet in one indivisible point.

By loving and glorifying God we immediately enjoy him, or find our own happiness in these noblest exercises of our minds upon their highest object, especially as connected with correspondent returns of love from this object. On the other hand, our felicity in the regular and full enjoyment of our Maker eminently glorifies him, both as it displays the riches and triumph of his goodness in harmony with his other perfections, and furnishes us with the greatest incentives and advantages to serve and praise him forever.

This, by the way, forcibly represents the absurdity and self-contradiction of that sentiment, which states true love to God to imply a willingness to give up the enjoyment of him for the sake of his greater glory! A sentiment as repugnant to the nature of the thing, as it is to the whole tenor of Scripture, and to the essential constitution of man, considered either as merely rational, or sanctified.

Further, it is easy to see that gratitude to God for his favours is an important branch of the pious temper; for

if the essential perfections of Deity are a proper object of esteem and complacency, then the exercise of these perfections in acts of beneficence to us demands the correspondent feelings and acknowledgments of gratitude; gratitude as constant and progressive, as is the current of divine benefits.

True love of God likewise involves a reverential and filial fear of his power, justice, and paternal displeasure; a steady and cheerful trust in his governing wisdom, benevolence, and faithfulness; a quiet resignation to his disposing pleasure, even in the most trying scenes; an habitual and divine joy in his perfect and universal administration; a prevailing and effectual desire to comport with or be conformed to all his perfections; to be obedient to his whole preceptive will, and to hold communion with him in his various ordinances and works.

The way is now prepared to consider,

Secondly, The *grounds* or *motives* of this divine affection. These are, first, the essential perfections of God; and secondly, his relations and communications to us.

1. We are to love him primarily for his own loveliness; or as the text intimates, we are first to love him, as the Lord, the infinitely glorious Jehovah; and then, as our God, related to us by many endearing ties.

In proof of this, I would observe, if the character of God is really amiable in itself, it is fit that we should regard it accordingly; for it is certainly right to love what is right. We all find ourselves bound, and even constrained to love a worthy human character, at the first sight or hearing of it, previously to any thought of self-interest, or to the idea of deriving any benefit from it; yea, in opposition to private and selfish affection. Thus the excellent character of a WASHINGTON has commanded the esteem of distant nations, yea, of selfish

Britons, who, though obliged to view him in the late revolution as their most formidable enemy, yet felt themselves equally obliged to admire and extol those great and good qualities, which ennobled the man. How much greater then must be the obligation, which binds us all to revere and love the infinitely perfect Original, on account of his transcendent greatness and goodness! It is GOD's infinite perfection, which makes him to be a God, which constitutes all his glory and beauty. If therefore we overlook this, we overlook GOD himself; we set aside every thing in him, which is a ground of esteem or affection; consequently all our love, if we have any, must centre and terminate in self. In a word, it is self-evident, that no man can truly esteem and love the excellent character of Deity, unless he loves it on account of its excellence. This love to GOD for his own most amiable perfections, and especially for his holiness, which may be called the sum and crown of his perfections, is the most noble, prominent, and discriminating feature of true religion. But still it is not the only feature; the religion of fallen, imperfect man is not wholly made up of disinterested love either to GOD, or the created system. For,

In the 2d place, we are to love him not only as the LORD, but as *our* GOD. This points out the secondary ground to this duty. We are to love him as our Creator, who gave us our existence and faculties, and to whom therefore they ought to be affectionately devoted; as our Preserver and Benefactor, who, by upholding, actuating and comforting us every moment, acquires a new title, with each successive instant, to our best affections and service; as our Lawgiver and Judge, who has an undoubted right to give law to his own creatures, who has accordingly summed up his requirements in the great law of love, and who can and will reward or

punish their obedience or transgression; finally, as our merciful Father and Redeemer, who, by giving his own Son to die for our redemption, has bought us to himself at an infinite price, and thereby laid us under the most forcible and endearing obligations to glorify GOD with our bodies and spirits, which are his. The love and benefits of GOD in our creation and preservation, especially in our redemption and everlasting salvation, are constantly held up in Scripture as arguments to engage our love and obedience; and all the saints on sacred record are represented, as feeling the animating, constraining influence of these motives. A thankful sense therefore of the temporal, spiritual, and everlasting mercies of God, and a subordinate regard to our own interest, as affected thereby, do not betray a mean and unchristian selfishness, as some seem to represent, but form an essential trait in the truly pious character. If Moses, the first character for virtue in the Old Testament, was in some degree incited to duty by the future recompense of reward; if St. Paul and other eminent Christians were constrained by the mercies of GOD, and the love of Christ in redemption, to live to his glory; if the Redeemer himself was animated by the joy set before him; then it cannot be base or criminal for his disciples to be influenced by the same.

We proceed now to ascertain the *measure* of this love to God. We are to love him "with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the mind, and with all the strength." This noble cluster of emphatical and nearly synonymous expressions is designed more forcibly to express this one great idea, that God ought to be loved to the highest possible degree of our natural capacities. We must love him "with all our hearts," that is, with a cordial, unfeigned, governing affection, in opposition to a double or divided heart, a part of which seems

devoted to God and religion, while its supreme love and service are given to some other object. We must love him "with all our souls;" that is, with all the faculties of our souls. The understanding must be occupied in the contemplation of him; the judgment must hold him in the highest esteem; the will must embrace him, as its chief good; and the affections meet and rest in him, as their central and ultimate object. We must love him "with all our minds;" that is, a well informed mind must be the guide, and a willing mind the spring and soul of our piety. Finally, we are to love him with "all our strength;" that is, our affection must be vigorous and operative; it must seize and strain every nerve, and exert the whole strength of our souls and bodies in the service of the glorious and beloved object. In a word, these strong phrases do not imply, that divine love ought to swallow up our faculties in such a manner, as to extinguish all our other passions, or shut out every innocent earthly object and entertainment, or keep the mind in a constant passionate rapture of religious zeal and joy; they only intend, that love to God must steadily keep the throne in our breasts, and duly regulate and sanctify all our inferior affections and pursuits.

Let us now, in the last place, attend to the superior *importance* of this divine principle. Love to our Maker is here styled the first and great commandment. It is so in regard of its object. As God is infinitely more excellent, than all other beings, so love to him must proportionably transcend all other obligations and virtues. That affection, which embraces an infinite object, the sum of all being and beauty, seems to possess a sort of infinity, an amplitude, an elevation, a glory derived from and congenial to that of its object. Further, as

the infinite perfections of God, and his consequent authority over his rational creatures, are the foundation of all their religious and moral obligations; so a due respect to these divine perfections and this authority must be the ground work of all religion, the prime moving spring of universal obedience. Without this regard to God, there is no holy, acceptable obedience in any instance whatever; but where this exists, it ever leads to genuine religious obedience in every particular; it forms the only sure, efficacious, and inflexible principle of virtue.

Again. The love of GOD appears greater than the love of our neighbour in another respect, namely, because the latter is to be loved chiefly for the sake of the former, or as the offspring and image of GOD, and the object of his paternal affection. We are also to love our neighbour in subordination to GOD, so as to be ready to give up the most valuable and favourite creature, when it comes in competition with the will, the favour, the interest of the Creator. This is doubtless the import of that remarkable text, Luke xiv. 26, and was exemplified in Abraham, when he offered up the dearest earthly object.

Blessed be GOD, we, who are parents, are not called, as was Abraham, to offer up an only son with our own hands; yet we are sometimes called to resign our beloved children, who are dear as a right hand, to the stroke of death. In such cases true love to God will unite our wills to his, will swallow up our natural and earthly affections in a supreme regard to his pleasure, his approbation and honour, and this will make us ultimately feel and act, as if we hated and despised the most beloved creature, compared with the infinite Creator.

Finally. The love of God is the first and great command, as it is the principal source or ingredient of our

happiness. This divine affection directly tends to assimilate us to its glorious and blessed object; to enlarge, purify, and elevate our minds; to improve us in the various branches of moral goodness, which constitutes the health, the perfection, the felicity of our rational nature. Divine love unites us to God its object, and gives us the happifying enjoyment of him. As God is the sovereign good, the adequate portion of our souls, so love introduces us to the possession of this good; it introduces us to an object, sufficient to employ, to entertain, to absorb all our faculties of contemplation and enjoyment. It unites us to a Friend, who is infinitely wise, faithful, and good; who has no unkindness to be suspected, no sorrows to be condoled, no change to be feared; who is forever glorious and happy, and forever our own, and is always at hand to guard, assist, and comfort us. How great the happiness arising from an intercourse of love with such an object even in this state of distance and imperfection! But how unspeakably greater the bliss of seeing him face to face in the light of future glory; of beholding, loving, and enjoying him in an immediate, perfect, progressive manner forever and ever! Well might the Psalmist in the view of this blessedness exclaim, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness; for in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

In the review of this subject, it is natural to reflect on the goodness as well, as propriety and justice of that divine constitution, which makes love to God the first duty of man. The divine Legislator herein has equally consulted and inseparably united his own rights and dignity, and our interest and happiness; for this pious regard to the Deity is the main qualification for and ingredient in rational felicity.

We likewise infer the destructive tendency of impiety and atheism, both to societies and individuals, by undermining the foundation of order, virtue, and rational felicity. We infer too the dangerous error of those moralists, who place the whole duty of man in the personal and social virtues, while they overlook, and perhaps ridicule, as mere superstition or enthusiasm, the exercises of love and devotion towards God. It appears from our doctrine, that piety is the basis and soul of moral excellence and human happiness; that it is perfectly fit in itself, is necessary to the uniform, persevering, and acceptable discharge of social and private obligations, and is essentially pre-requisite to the final approbation and enjoyment of God. Let our accomplishments in other respects be ever so amiable or splendid, if we are eminently just and kind, generous and honourable towards our fellow men, and our character to human view is quite unexceptionable and noble; yet if we treat the original beauty and good, the supreme Parent and Benefactor, with cold indifference or pointed opposition, we betray a very unnatural and monstrous state of mind, which is utterly inconsistent with real honesty and goodness. Let those, who have hitherto lived as without God in the world, labour to feel their guilt and danger, and earnestly seek the recovery of that divine temper, which is the root of human perfection and felicity. Let those, who possess it, be daily employed in feeling the sacred flame; let the daily breath of their hearts and of their lives echo that becoming and elevated language of piety, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth, that I desire, besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

# Sermon V.

## On the Love of our Neighbour.

MARK xii. 31.

*And the second is like unto it, namely, this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

THIS and the preceding verse present to our view a beautiful compend of true religion. They contain the answer, which our Saviour gave to this important question, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" His first reply is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart;....this is the first and great commandment." This verse holds up the superior obligation and importance of piety, or an inward governing regard to the Deity. Accordingly, the prime duty and excellence of love to God were the theme of our late meditations in this place. The words, fixed at the head of this discourse, call our attention to the second great duty of man, which is of similar importance as well, as inseparably connected with the first. "And the second is like unto it, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

In illustrating the subject before us, we will consider the object, the nature, the standard, and the reasons of the duty enjoined.

First. The *object* of this duty is our neighbour. But who is designated or included in this appellation? If a Jew in our Saviour's day had been asked this question, he would have replied, those of my own kindred and

nation, of my own religious sect or denomination; these, and these only, are my neighbours, and the proper objects of my charitable affection. And if some bigoted professors of Christianity were interrogated in the same manner, I fear their hearts would echo the same reply, though perhaps they would blush to avow it with their lips. But if we apply to our divine Lord for a decision of this question, we shall find him determine it on a plan infinitely more noble and enlarged. When a Jewish lawyer asked him, "And who is my neighbour?" he relates to him the story of a certain Jew, who, falling into the hands of robbers, was stripped, wounded, and left weltering in his gore. He was found in the road by two Jewish travellers; a contracted, unfeeling priest, and a Levite of the same mean, and barbarous temper; who, instead of commiserating and relieving the wretched object, though one of their own country and religion, only gave him a cold, distant look, and passed by on the other side. At length a Samaritan, one of another nation, and of a quite different religion, with whom the Jews disdained any kind of intercourse, finds the unhappy stranger, and his heart is instantly struck at the pitiable sight; his compassionate, beneficent love bursts forth through every barrier of national prejudice or party distinction; he embraces a professed enemy in the arms of fervent benevolence, and treats him with all the tender and generous kindness of a brother. "Which, now, (says our Saviour) which of these three was neighbour to him, that fell among thieves?" The lawyer readily answers, "He that shewed mercy on him." Then said Jesus, "Go thou, and do likewise. Look upon thyself a neighbour to every man, and every man a neighbour to thee. Let the stream of thy extended and active good will flow out to all, whom thou art capable of serving, whether they be strangers or ac-

quaintance, friends or foes, just or unjust." Thus the gospel holds up all mankind, as the object of our neighbourly and fraternal regards.

Secondly. We are now to inquire into the *nature* of the affection here required to this object. And it is obvious to remark, that there are many things, which wear some appearance of love to mankind, which yet fall essentially short of the spirit of the duty before us. There is an instinctive and painful sympathy awakened by the sight of a fellow creature in distress, which engages our immediate efforts for his relief. There is a strong natural affection towards our kindred, especially towards our tender offspring. There is a characteristic sweetness and goodness of temper, which forms an early and constitutional feature in human characters. There is also an artificial politeness and generosity, the product of civilization and refinement, or at best of merely rational and philosophical considerations. There is likewise a warm affection to others, which grows out of a likeness or union of sentiment and disposition, of party or country, or which is nourished by the enjoyment or the hope of their partial friendship and beneficence to us; not to add, that there is sometimes an affected display of kindness and munificence to individuals, or of noble patriotic zeal for the public, which is prompted by merely vain or selfish motives, and sometimes by views very base and iniquitous. It is evident, at first sight, that neither of these apparent instances of benevolence, nor all of them combined, fulfil the extensive precept in the text. If you ask what further is included, we reply, genuine, virtuous love to our neighbour is ever founded upon and connected with piety, or a religious and prevailing regard to our Creator. If we love God with a supreme affection, we shall naturally love his rational offspring for his sake, on account of their near

relation to him, and the image or display, which they present, of his glorious perfections; we shall love and do them good from a pious respect to the example, the will, and the glory of their divine Parent and ours, who is good to all, who commands us to manifest our love to him by acts of kindness to his creatures, and who is greatly pleased and honoured by every effort to promote their felicity. In a word, since benevolence is the very nature and beauty of God himself, and since love to him and daily intercourse with him directly conduce to assimilate us more and more to his character; it follows, that a pious affection to the Deity will soften and expand the heart in godlike benevolence; will kill a selfish, proud, and malignant spirit, and form its possessor to a gentle and forgiving, a just and fair, a sincere and faithful, a beneficent and liberal character. Thus the love of GOD and of our neighbour are intimately united; the one is the sure and effectual basis, the other the rising and beautiful superstructure of universal goodness. As he, who truly knows and regards his Maker, will imitate and please him by loving and seeking the good of mankind; so he, who has no proper affection towards GOD, can have no genuine love to man, nor any certain and commanding principle of social virtue. Agreeably, an inspired apostle assures us, that every one, who truly loveth his brother, is born of GOD, and knoweth GOD; but he, that loveth not, knoweth not GOD; for GOD is love.

Further, as the love of our neighbour supposes a religious principle, as its parent and support, so its properties and fruits embrace the whole compass of social duty; for all the commands of the second table are comprehended in this one saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This is that charity, which is styled the bond of perfectness, because it is the life and

perfection of every virtue, the uniting band or centre of the whole circle of Christian graces. As all GOD's moral perfections and acts may be summed up in love, so all the affections and exercises, which we owe to our fellow men, are included in charity. This comprehends, or effectually produces a proper esteem of their persons and stations, a virtuous and friendly complacency in their characters, whenever they appear to be holy, or morally excellent, a cordial gratitude for their favours, and above all, a benevolent, active zeal for their welfare. Love unites our hearts to the interest of its object, and engages us to desire, to pursue, and to rejoice in it as our own. Love is eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. It springs forward to relieve the children of want and distress; to compose and tranquilize the sons of contention; to enlighten, comfort, or establish the ignorant, the wavering, or the faint-hearted in religion; and, in a word, to diffuse happiness all around, as far as its ability can reach, through the family, through the vicinity, through the country, yea, through the whole brotherhood of man. If we would see this excellent virtue in its full dress, let us contemplate the noble picture of it drawn by the hand of inspiration in the 13th chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians. "Charity," or love to our neighbour, "suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

To throw still further light on this interesting subject let us attend,

Thirdly, To the *standard* or measure of the affection required. We are commanded to love our neighbour

as ourselves. But what is the import of this remarkable phrase? We answer, it seems capable of a threefold construction. It may intend an *equality of degree*. This is the sense of some learned expositors. But suppose we possess an equal affection to our neighbour as to ourselves, it will not follow, that we must or can pay the same degree of practical attention to his welfare, as to our own; for besides the one common affection to him and ourselves, we all possess a variety of private appetites and passions; and to provide for and gratify these, must necessarily occupy a peculiar and large portion of our time and pursuits. Besides, we have a far more immediate, and constant, and lively view of our own interests as well, as far more frequent and advantageous opportunities to promote them, than we can have in reference to the interest of others; and we are evidently entrusted by our Creator with the care of ourselves in a special sense, with the care of our own welfare as well, as of our moral behaviour. Admitting therefore the possible existence and obligation of an equal inward benevolence to my neighbour as to myself, yet I neither can nor ought to carry this principle fully into practice. Indeed the principle itself seems contrary to evident fact; for all mankind, the most virtuous and enlarged as well, as the most contracted and vicious, have a natural, inseparable principle of self-love, which inspires a peculiar feeling for their own safety and happiness, as an important personal good; and to cherish and act upon this principle, within certain limits, is both proper and useful; and far from being condemned is plainly warranted by this very command, which presupposes the existence and lawfulness of this private affection, and makes it the rule of social. For in the next place, the phrase before us may import a *similar kind of affection* with that, which we bear to

ourselves. As every man loves himself with a sincere and fervent, a vigorous and constant affection; an affection, which usually excites the most provident and industrious care to avoid misery and secure happiness, which sweetens all his labours for that end, and which produces either great joy or grief in the attainment or disappointment of his favourite object; so we ought to feel and express the same kind of regard to our neighbour, and thus to make his interest, his joys and sorrows our own.

Finally, here, the expression, *as thyself*, imports that our affection and attention to the good of others should bear a reasonable proportion to our love and care of ourselves; that after making particular and competent provision for our own welfare, our affectionate contrivance and endeavour, our talents and property must be consecrated to the good of mankind. In short, our text obliges us to feel and act towards our neighbours, on all occasions, just as we should reasonably desire, that they should feel and conduct towards us, agreeably to that most impartial and excellent rule, "Whatever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so unto them."

Do any inquire the *reasons* of this strict and extensive injunction; or why so high a pitch of benevolence is required of us? The answer to this completes the plan of our discourse. And first, we are obliged to it, because it is fit and beautiful in itself. If my neighbour is equally worthy of esteem with myself; if he has equal capacity, need, and desire of happiness; and if his welfare be as valuable, as good in itself, and as precious to him, as mine is to me; then it is in its own nature right, that I should regard his person and interest as my own. Besides, all men are brethren, having the same common parent and origin, nature and condition,

necessities and prospects, the same mutual dependence and social affections; it is therefore congruous and beautiful for them to feel and act towards one another upon the plan of brotherly love, reciprocal kindness, and generosity. We may add, the example of God and his Son enforces this obligation upon us. The whole name or character of God is comprised in love; in wise, pure, comprehensive, almighty benevolence. This is the grand spring of all the divine operations in creation, providence and redemption. Now imitation of God is the first duty and highest excellence of man. A grateful sense of the rich, disinterested goodness of God and the Saviour to our rebellious world peculiarly becomes those, who are so infinitely indebted to this goodness: and where this gratitude prevails, it will engage us to love and do good to one another, as God has loved us all, and hereby to further the designs and spread the triumphs of divine benevolence as well, as to approve ourselves his gentle children and favourites. And since God has likewise enjoined this benevolent affection upon us by his own infinite authority, we cannot withhold it without trampling under foot the rights both of God and of man, and proving ourselves to be as destitute of piety, as we are of social virtue. Let me add, this love to one another is the foundation and soul both of public and individual happiness. By devoting each member of the community to the interest of all the rest, it secures and advances the common good to the highest degree. This forms the faithful ruler, the obedient subject, the patriotic citizen, the obliging neighbour, the united, vigorous, and happy society! This not only gives to the several members of society the sublime pleasure, which arises from conscious goodness, from the reciprocal endearments and offices of love, but it puts each individ-

ual in possession of the whole mass of good, enjoyed by all his fellow members, yea, in some sense, of all the good, which he sees diffused through the universe, since his benevolence enables him to rejoice in it as his own. Every argument therefore of intrinsic fitness, equity, and beauty, of divine authority and human interest and happiness, concurs to recommend the duty before us.

In reflecting on the preceding subject, we are led to see in what sense Christian benevolence may be called disinterested. It is not so in such a sense, as excludes a regular and even peculiar love and care of ourselves, nor in such a sense, as would imply, that love to others is not as really our affection, or conducive to our own gratification and interest, as even self-love can possibly be; for there is no temper or course of action, which produces such immediate, such rich and lasting enjoyment to the subject, as the habitual feeling, the conscious and successful exertion of Christian benevolence. The only sense therefore in which it can be called disinterested is, that it is not the offspring of mere natural self-love, but is derived from a source, which regards an object, and pursues an end distinct from those of bare private affection, and is ever ready to sacrifice a lesser selfish interest to the superior good of its object. Yea, to offer up our whole personal happiness in time to the civil and religious interests of mankind.

Further, we learn that piety and social virtue must be united in order to complete a good character; that neither of them can be stable, genuine, or consistent without the other. We also learn what is the most prominent feature, or the leading spirit and excellency of the Christian system, namely, love to God and man. With-

out this the most orthodox faith, the most confident hope in the divine mercy and the merits of the Saviour, and the most zealous and scrupulous attendance on Christian institutions will prove but vanity and delusion.

Further, it is natural to ask, what benevolent or humane motive can induce so many persons in this enlightened age not only to reject Christianity themselves, but to labour to undermine its credit and influence among their fellow creatures? Do they seriously wish to extirpate a religion, whose whole aim is to promote mutual love, usefulness, and happiness among men upon principles and motives, which alone can effectually attain and permanently secure them?

To conclude, let us survey our own characters in the light of this subject. Let us ask our consciences, whether we possess that love to our neighbour, to every person within our reach, which is ready to treat him as another self, to seek and rejoice in his happiness, to feel and relieve his distresses, as if they were our own? Have we that virtuous benevolence, which renders us uniformly amiable and useful actors in every station and relation in the family, the church, and the state? And is the whole system of our social virtues built upon and supported by supreme love to God, and a cordial faith in his Son? These are the grand questions, which must decide our fate. All other accomplishments, short of love, prophecies, knowledge, tongues, yea, faith and hope shall vanish away.

That there is a principle in good men, which answers to this description, or which seeks and rests in the good of others, as its ultimate end, is proclaimed by the united voice of experience, of reason, and Scripture. But though this disinterested affection be an eminent branch of the Christian temper, yet it does not (as some

have maintained) constitute the whole definition of virtue, or comprise all the parts of an excellent human character. As it does not extinguish the other innocent feelings of human nature, so neither does it entirely change or sublimate them into itself. There is no inconsistency, either in theory or in fact, between a subordinate regard to our own interest and a benevolent affection to the general good, any more than between the private attraction of cohesion and the public law of gravitation in the natural world; but as the former guards the existence and welfare of individual bodies, while the latter makes all these individuals conspire to the general order and utility of the whole; so in the breast of the good man private self-love superintends and promotes his personal welfare, while public benevolence seeks the general good of his fellow beings. While a virtuous love of others unites his heart to their interest, and makes it his own, self-love, as a secondary principle, prompts him to seek it as a mean of his own gratification and enjoyment; for self-love necessarily desires and pursues whatever it finds conducive to personal happiness, and therefore often has a concomitant and harmless influence even in the most general beneficent actions.

I need not remind you, that you will presently have an opportunity to give a practical answer to these questions, to determine whether your religion consists in a mere ceremonious observance of pious institutions, or whether it unites mercy with sacrifice; whether the character of any of you, like that of the hypocritical Pharisees of old, combines an unfeeling, covetous, and barbarous disposition towards man with the parade of devotion and sanctity towards God, or like that of the good Centurion, sends up the united fragrance of pray-

ers and alms, of fervent piety and liberal charity, as an acceptable memorial before God.

Let us solemnly remember, that all other accomplishments, short of love to God and man, whether prophecies, knowledge, tongues, yea, faith and hope shall vanish away. But charity never faileth; it forms the spirit, employment, and bliss of perfect and happy immortals. Well therefore might the apostle conclude his encomium upon this excellent grace with those memorable words; "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

# Sermon VI.

## On Christian Charity.

1 Cor. xiii. 13.

——*The greatest of these is charity.*

THE apostle in this chapter delivers a fervent and sublime encomium on charity, and ranks it far above the most splendid gifts, which can adorn either men, or angels.

There seems to have been an invidious emulation among the Corinthians on account of their miraculous spiritual gifts, and a proud ostentation in the exercise of them. Hence, at the close of the preceding chapter, after enumerating and commending some of the most distinguished of these gifts, and exhorting the Christians at Corinth to "covet them," yea, to "covet them earnestly," the apostle adds, that he would yet "shew them a more excellent way;" that is, something, which had a better claim to their zeal and pursuit, and which would contribute more to their honour, usefulness, and joy.

But what is this "more excellent way?" It is charity or Christian love; which is here opposed and preferred, not only to extraordinary knowledge and eloquence, to prophetic and miraculous powers, but to the greatest exploits of apparent benevolence and religious zeal; such as devoting all our goods to the relief of the poor, and even our bodies to the flame in the cause of truth and holiness; the first of which has the appearance of uncommon love to men, and the last, of extraordinary love

to God. Yet if these are only appearances; if the inward principles producing them are pride, vain-glory, natural fortitude or obstinacy of temper, or some similar motive, without any sincere respect to the glory of God, or the happiness of man; in this case, the life and substance of charity are wanting, and these plausible actions are but a hollow, deceitful, and unprofitable show.

The apostle further tells us, that these shining accomplishments and appearances will soon forever cease; but that true charity never faileth.

In the last verse of the chapter, he prefers love to other Christian graces, as he had before preferred it to extraordinary gifts. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity; these three; but the greatest of these is charity:" q. d. now, or during the present imperfect and militant state of the church, each of these three graces is useful and necessary, and therefore must abide in the church at large, and in the bosom of each of its sincere members. Yet still charity is the greatest of the three, both in its nature and duration.

In further discoursing on the subject, we will more fully describe the virtue of charity, and then show its pre-eminence above all other duties and graces as well, as above the most illustrious and even supernatural gifts.

In explaining the *nature* of charity, it is proper to observe, that the original word precisely signifies *love*. It therefore denotes something far more noble and extensive, than mere acts of mercy and liberality to the needy, or sentiments of candour and catholicism towards our fellow Christians. The former of these often flow from a kind of mechanical benevolence, or occasional sympathy; while the latter in many cases imply and protect a spirit of indifference to all religious principles and duties. When this is the case, our disposition to succour the wretched is rather an amiable instinct, than a

Christian grace; and our pretended candour is rather a vice, than a virtue.

Evangelical charity is a principle infinitely superior to these. It is a right disposition of mind towards all intellectual beings, and, above all, towards God himself, the fountain and summary of being, perfection, and happiness. It implies such a fixed view and esteem of God's transcendent greatness, rectitude, and glory, as engage us to consecrate all our faculties, affections, and actions to him, desiring above all things to imitate and honour him, and superlatively delighting in him as the Supreme Beauty and Good. As love to an excellent human friend, benefactor, and ruler implies complacency in his character and government, an earnest pursuit of his happiness and honour, and a high estimation of his company and friendship; so love to God involves a reverential affection to his awful and amiable attributes, a cordial acquiescence in his perfect administration, a supreme devotion to his interest, an unlimited desire of his favour and delight in his fellowship, habitual gratitude for his benefits, and a studious, practical conformity to his moral character and will. In a word, true friendship to the Most High embraces his whole undivided character; it relishes his holiness and justice as well, as his goodness; it loves him for his own essential loveliness as well, as for his communicated benefits.

If we love God in the manner now defined, we shall naturally love his rational offspring for his sake, on account of their near relation to him, and the image, which they bear, of his glorious perfections. We shall exercise benevolence to them from a pious respect to the example, the pleasure, and the honour of their divine Parent and ours, who loves and does good both to us and them, who commands us to show our affection to him by acts of kindness to them, and who is greatly

pleased and glorified by every effort to advance their virtue and happiness. Since benevolence is the nature and beauty of God himself; since love to him and daily intercourse with him beget increasing likeness to his character, we instantly perceive that a devout affection to the Deity will soften and expand the heart in godlike benevolence, will kill a selfish, proud, and malignant spirit, and form its possessor to a gentle and forgiving, a just and fair, a sincere and faithful, a beneficent and liberal character.

Thus love to God and charity to our neighbour are inseparably united; the one is the sure basis, the other the beautiful superstructure, of universal goodness. As he, who truly knows and regards his Maker, will imitate and please him by loving and seeking the good of his creatures; so he, who has no proper affection to the great Parent, can have no genuine love to his children, nor any commanding principle of social virtue. He, who beholds the creation with the eyes of speculative or practical atheism, can see no order nor beauty in the system to draw and bind his affections to it, or to give him a lively and permanent interest in its happiness. Agreeably, an inspired apostle assures us, that "every one, who loveth him that begat, loveth him also, that is begotten of him;" that "every one, who loveth his brother, is born of God, and knoweth God; but he that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love."

As charity to our neighbour thus grows out of religious principle, so its properties and fruits embrace the whole compass of social duty. Hence love to man is styled the fulfilling of the law, and the bond of perfectness; because it gives being and perfection to every moral virtue; because it unites and concentrates all social duties. As all God's moral perfections and actions are summed up in love, as so many different modifications

and expressions of it, so all the affections and offices, which we owe to mankind, are included in charity. This comprehends, and produces, a proper esteem of their persons and stations, a virtuous complacency in their excellent qualities, a cordial gratitude for their favours, and, above all, a benevolent pursuit of their welfare. By uniting our hearts to their interest, it makes us seek and rejoice in it, as our own.

If we would see this generous virtue in its full size and beauty, let us minutely survey its several features, as drawn by the hand of inspiration in this chapter. "Charity suffereth long and is kind;" that is, she is slow to resent injuries, and prompt to confer benefits. "Charity envieth not;" she does not grieve at the excellence or happiness of others. "Charity vaunteth not herself, is not puffed up, doth not behave herself unseemly;" that is, she does not proudly feel, nor ostentatiously exhibit, her own advantages; nor treat with supercilious airs those, who are placed below her; but her whole deportment is modest and decorous. "Seeketh not her own;" far from moving in the narrow circle of self-interest, she sacrifices personal ease and profit to the general good. "Is not easily provoked;" she not only refrains from causeless and excessive anger, but maintains a dignified composure even under great provocations. "Thinketh no evil;" she does not easily suspect evil of others, nor does she wish or contrive evil against them. "Rejoiceth not in iniquity;" she takes no pleasure either in the unjust actions or sufferings of her neighbour. "But rejoiceth in the truth;" she is delighted in beholding innocence vindicated, and the cause of truth and righteousness triumph. "Beareth all things;" that is, she covers the infirmities and faults of others, as far as is possible or safe, with the mantle of silence and forbearance.

"Believeth all things;" that is, she is ready to believe as favourably as possible concerning every person; she will not impute falsehood or evil to any without convincing evidence. "Hopeth all things; she will not despair of her neighbour's repentance and salvation, so long as there remains a possibility of his amendment. "Endureth all things;" she supports every evil from God, and every misfortune from men, with meekness and equanimity.

Having gone over this beautiful description, we must stop a few moments to observe, that several articles in it must be understood in a qualified sense.

When charity is represented, as bearing and enduring all things, this does not imply, that the Christian spirit savours of stoical apathy, or of weak pusillanimity; that it has no feeling of calamity, and no resentment of injury; or that it is wholly unmoved by the sins and distresses of others. But the idea is, that while Christianity, on some occasions, allows the sorrowful and even angry emotions of nature, it also duly regulates and sooths them; yea, renders them excellent means of trying and maturing our virtues, particularly our patient resignation to God, and our tender, active benevolence to men.

Again, when charity is represented, as believing and hoping all things, this by no means intends that Christian love believes and hopes without, or even contrary to reasonable evidence. The charity of the gospel is not a blind and foolish principle. She does not bestow her complacency on all characters, principles, and actions without inquiry or discrimination. She does not embrace those persons, as good men, whose avowed principles are evidently subversive of the faith and hope, the morals and piety of Christians. Nor does she admit to her fellowship those professed believers,

whose lives contradict and disgrace their profession. Though we are forbidden to judge the secrets of men's hearts, and are bound to think as favourably of them, as their visible profession and practice will allow; yet it is no violation of charity to infer the badness of the tree from the corrupt quality of its fruits. It is an eternal maxim both of reason and revelation, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Those men therefore insult both our reason and religion, who lay claim to our Christian charity, and require us to believe and hope well concerning their present character and future well-being, or who insist that their hearts are good, when their outward conduct is immoral or impious; or when they habitually and knowingly allow themselves in some one forbidden course, though in other respects they may exhibit a decent and even amiable deportment.

This leads me to remark further, that it is a dangerous idea of charity to suppose, that it consists in a silent and courtly indulgence of those around us in all their follies and vices; that it forbids us to give them pain, or to hazard their resentment, by faithfully reproving their transgressions, and labouring to reform them. Christian love does not oblige us to suffer and bear all things in such a sense, as to tolerate and countenance those things, which are evil. The same apostle, who gives us this soft and tender description of charity, was himself a zealous and constant reprover of wickedness. His whole life and ministry were employed in admonishing and converting a sinful world. He tells us, that on a certain occasion he publicly withstood a fellow-apostle to the face, when he found him worthy of blame. In a word, the example of Christ himself, and many express precepts both of the Old Testament and the New, require us to show our Chris-

tian love by rebuking offenders, by seeking to recover them to the right path by every effort of faithful and prudent zeal.

In fine, gospel charity has for its principal object the spiritual and immortal interests of mankind. The real Christian, having been deeply penetrated with the evil and danger of sin, with the importance of eternal realities, with the wonders and benefits of redeeming love, will desire above all things that his fellow sinners around him may have the same views, and partake in the same blessings with himself. His heart will echo the generous language of Paul to king Agrippa, "I would to God, that not only thou, but all that hear me, were both almost and altogether such as I am;" were perfectly acquainted with the divine consolations and hopes of Christianity.

Having largely explained the nature, let us now consider the *transcendent value* of Christian love. The apostle in this chapter, and the Bible at large, give charity, or real internal goodness, the preference to all those things, which are most apt to charm and dazzle mankind; such as religious ceremonies, extraordinary gifts, and even the virtues of gospel faith and hope. We will close our present discourse with shewing the superiority of divine love to *ceremonial duties*. This superiority, though not expressed, is fully implied in the passage before us.

The religion, which God prescribed to the Jews, consisted in part of positive institutions, or certain rites, which borrowed all their value and force from the will of the Deity. Gross and superstitious people were perpetually inclined to rest, and even glory in this class of duties, as a cover and compensation for the neglect of inward piety and charity. But their successive prophets, and especially our divine Lord, constantly warned

them of this dangerous error. The prophet Micah in particular, after declaring the insufficiency of mere ceremonies to procure the divine favour, adds, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Here justice, mercy, and practical piety are eminently styled *good;* that is, intrinsically, immutably, and eternally good, whereas the rites of the Levitical law were good only in an occasional and instrumental sense, or as temporary signs and means of true devotion, righteousness, and charity.

The Pharisees in our Saviour's time were very exact, yea, over scrupulous in observing the ceremonies of the law; yet Christ brands them as vile hypocrites on this very account; that is, because this ritual punctuality was united with, and intended to compound for, the neglect of the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and the love of God.

The same remarks will apply to the sacraments or positive rites of Christianity. They are only signs and instruments of love to God and man; and if they usurp the place of this, they will defeat, instead of promoting the end and life of religion.

Christian baptism is a very significant and useful rite; but how does it save or profit us? Not by putting away the filth of the flesh, not by washing or cleansing the body, but by the answer or engagement of a good conscience toward God; that is, it conduces to our benefit only, as it binds and urges us to real holiness. If therefore those, who present themselves or their children to this ordinance, do not honestly intend and improve it to this end, they not only destroy

its value, but convict themselves of hypocrisy and perfidy.

The Lord's supper is a most excellent institution; because it is not only a most impressive renewal of our baptismal oath, but when duly observed tends to enkindle the warmest gratitude to God and the Redeemer, to unite Christians into one affectionate family, to engage them to a studious imitation of that love, which they celebrate, and thus to improve them in universal goodness.

Christian love and its practical fruits are therefore the end and soul of these sacraments. If we do not sincerely use them, as signs and instruments of this heavenly temper, we and our religious profession are nothing; we contradict, defeat and disgrace these holy ordinances, and thus pervert appointed means of good into engines of unspeakable guilt and mischief, both to ourselves and others. It appears, then, that no religious rites have any value compared with, or separate from LOVE.

# Sermon VII.

## On Christian Charity.

1 Cor. xiii. 13.

——*The greatest of these is charity.*

HAVING described the nature of charity, and shown its superiority to ceremonial duties, we proceed *secondly* to prove, that it is also greater than the most splendid and even miraculous *gifts*.

The apostle in this chapter enumerates some of the extraordinary powers, which were conferred on the first preachers, and many of the first disciples of our religion; such as the gift of tongues, of prophecy, of understanding mysteries, and of working miracles. But these gifts, though more dazzling, are far inferior to the lowest degree of divine love. For the latter is a vital and transforming principle, which imparts to its possessor a new and divine nature, a permanent and excellent character; but the former may be styled adventitious accomplishments, which do not penetrate and sanctify the heart, but when bestowed on a vicious man, leave him as unholy and wicked as before; as in the case of Balaam, Judas, and others, whose miraculous gifts qualified them to edify others, but did not meliorate their own characters.

The spirit of love is a peculiar mark and seal of God's favourite children, and a sure pledge of future happiness. But the greatest gifts are often dispensed to the heirs of perdition. Agreeably, Christ tells us that

many, who have prophesied in his name, and done many wonderful works, shall be rejected at last among the workers of iniquity.

We may add, that gifts the most distinguished must ere long fail, but love will last forever. As the apostle enlarges on this idea, in order to show the pre-eminence of love, we will be somewhat particular in the illustration of it.

"Charity," says he, "never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." These miraculous gifts were soon to cease from the church, because the occasion of them was temporary. When the evidence of them was once completed, the whole canon of Scripture finished and widely dispersed, the gospel fully propagated, and the church of Christ enlarged and firmly established; the extraordinary manifestation of the Spirit was no longer needed, and therefore was withdrawn. But charity was never to withdraw itself from the bosom of the church, or the hearts of her real members. The obligation, necessity, and advantage of love are perpetual. The honour of God and his Son, the comfort, strength, and glory of Zion, the successful propagation of Christian truth in the surrounding world, must ever depend upon the culture of this divine temper. Then, and only then, does the church of Christ appear a glorious fabric, when love cements its several parts, and diffuses itself through the whole. When the edifice of the church was once raised, extraordinary gifts, like the scaffolding of the building, were taken away; but charity, being an essential part, a main pillar as well, as the most delightful ornament of the structure, must still remain to beautify and support it.

As love can never fail in the church on earth, so it will always live in the New Jerusalem above. There, the extraordinary gifts of the apostolic age will not be needed, but will be lost forever in the perfect light of heaven, as the twinkling stars vanish before the rising sun. "Now," says the apostle, "we know in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I also am known;" that is, I shall know myself and superior beings, shall know God and his works, in a manner so direct and intuitive, in a degree so perfect and elevated, that my present knowledge, though aided by miraculous inspiration, is childish folly, yea, darkness in the comparison.

In consequence of this perfect knowledge, love shall never fail, but grow and expand to eternity. The glorified Christian will love his Master and Redeemer with an ardour and strength equal to his knowledge. As he will never cease for a moment to exert and enlarge his understanding upon the divine perfections; so his admiring and devout affection to this infinite object will ever keep pace with this constant exertion and improvement of his understanding. At the same time the unceasing complacential smiles and beatific communications of God to him will call forth his highest, his perpetual efforts of gratitude and praise. With what affectionate rapture will he behold the glory, and enjoy the society, of his exalted Redeemer! How will he gaze on that beloved and majestic face, which was once torn with thorns and pale with death, but is now arrayed in divine beauty and splendour! With what tender, yet awful affection will he behold the marks of those sufferings, and of that love, which procured his salvation!

The saints in glory, being thus united to God by perfect knowledge and love, will of course be united to one another in fervent charity. Their perfect knowledge of the truth and of each other's characters will forever banish those mistakes and divided opinions, which in this world so frequently produce mutual shiness, alienation, and injurious treatment. The celestial community will not, like earthly societies, be composed of members, possessing jarring sentiments, dispositions, and characters. Each member of that fraternity will fully know and appreciate every excellent quality, possessed by any other member. He will also perceive the near and inseparable union, which every one bears to the Deity. Of course he will feel himself linked to every fellow member, and to the whole, by the most endearing ties of friendship and benevolence.

As the maturity of knowledge, so the perfect rectitude of will and of moral character among the blessed, will exalt and perpetuate their charity. This divine affection will never be checked or interrupted by inferior and opposing passions. The pure love of holiness, filling every heart, will unite each member to his holy and perfect associates, and, above all, to that Being, who is the source and sum of moral rectitude and beauty.

The complete happiness of glorified saints will also nourish the flame of their charity. As the capacity of each one will be perfectly filled with joy, he will of course delight in the felicity of all his partners in bliss. There will be no room for jealousy or envy, in a state, where every one possesses as much honour and blessedness, as his faculties can receive. We find in the present world, that when a man feels truly happy in himself, his heart naturally overflows with benevolence to others. What then may be expected in the region of complete and universal happiness? How naturally will

the spirits of the blessed inhabitants mingle with one another, and each individual enjoy the transports of every kindred spirit, and the common felicity of the whole! With what pure and ever growing delight will they unite their hearts and voices, both in conversation and in praise? With what sacred friendship will they contemplate, promote, and rejoice in each other's perfection and blessedness!

Well therefore may charity be ranked above the greatest gifts, since it not only infinitely excels them in point of duration, but forms the principal happiness and glory of celestial beings. It remains that we shew,

In the *third* place, that love is superior even to Christian *faith* and *hope*. Though these are far more valuable, than even the extraordinary communications of the Spirit; though they are essential and abiding graces in the church below; yet in real worth and duration they must yield to charity.

By faith is intended a firm and vital belief of the truths of the gospel; and by hope, a well grounded and joyful expectation of its promised blessings. Both these graces are indispensably necessary, and highly beneficial, in this state of imperfection and trial, while the Christian remains at a distance from the great Object of his expected felicity. In such a situation he necessarily walks by faith, and lives upon hope. Both his character and comfort are sustained and nourished by these virtues: yet still faith and hope, strictly speaking, are but temporary graces. For where vision begins, faith ends. Agreeably, faith and sight are opposed to each other. Hope is also confined to this state of imperfection, and implies that its object is not fully seen and enjoyed; "for," as the apostle reasons, "what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" Complete fruition will therefore put a final period to hope. At least, neither of these two

graces can exist in the same mode, or have the same use, in a world of perfect knowledge and enjoyment, which they possess in the present state. But it is the prerogative of charity to derive new and immortal vigour from that very sight and fruition, in which these other graces are forever lost.

I must also add, that while these virtues continue, love still has the pre-eminence; for faith, considered as distinct from charity, is an act or accomplishment of the understanding; but love is a vital principle of the heart. Mere faith may exist in hypocrites, yea in devils; but charity forms the main characteristic of holy and virtuous beings. I grant that faith is often represented in the gospel, as the root of moral and Christian excellence, as the medium of a saving union to and interest in the Redeemer; as the great condition of the sinner's justification and eternal happiness. But when faith is thus described and extolled, it always intends a belief of the heart as well, as of the head, and is accordingly expressed by phrases, which denote a cordial and practical affection to Christ as well, as a speculative assent to his doctrines. No person can truly receive Christ, come to him, trust and rejoice in him, or in one word, comply with his method of salvation, without sincerely loving his character and requirements. So far therefore as our faith is truly virtuous and saving, it is love, which makes and proves it to be so. Accordingly, faith, without love and corresponding obedience, is declared to be unprofitable and dead.

Hope likewise is no further a Christian grace, than it implies and nourishes a spirit of charity. Without this, it is a merely selfish passion, which terminates its desires and expectations in personal happiness. It becomes a gospel virtue only, when it delights in God, and expects its ultimate blessedness in him; when it af-

fectionately anticipates the heavenly felicity, as the fruit and crown of present holiness, as mainly consisting in the perfect exercises and joys of virtuous love; and as embracing the consummate happiness of all its fellow saints, united with the highest glory of God and his Son; and when these generous prospects expand the heart with the best affections toward God and man.

As love is thus the life of Christian faith and hope, so it is their designed end and perfection. The main use of the two latter is to invigorate and mature the former. When man by sin had lost the image of God, consisting in love, and of course was cut off from his favour, a revelation of divine mercy was needful for his recovery. By believing and hoping in this merciful revelation, the guilty offender is encouraged and allured to return to God by filial love and obedience, and thus the work of charity, or real holiness, is gradually perfected in his nature. As love therefore is the end of divine revelation, and indeed the end and substance of all religion, so faith and hope are means to this end. Their office and glory consist in being handmaids to charity; and when they have reared her to maturity, and conducted her to the door of her appointed celestial habitation, they will resign their employment and existence forever.

We might further remark, that the immediate object and fruit of charity far excel those of the two other virtues. The object of virtuous love is the universe, including the Creator and all his rational creatures. Its fruit is the greatest public good, which it has power to produce. It directly seeks and promotes the common happiness. It immediately forms the generous, active friend, patriot, and philanthropist. But mere faith and hope are private virtues, which more immediately regard and secure personal benefit.

Finally, the crowning pre-eminence of love is, that it directly assimilates and unites the soul to its Maker. "God is love." This characterizes his whole nature and conduct. His wisdom is but enlightened benevolence, planning the best means of extensive good. His power is but the energy of love, giving full effect to these means. His truth is the sincerity and constancy of goodness. His holiness is but pure and comprehensive love, steadily regarding and pursuing the order and virtuous felicity of the moral system. His governing justice, even as exercised in threatening, chastising, and finally punishing sin, like that of good parents and rulers, secures the obedience and happiness of the whole, by needful warnings, by terrible, but wholesome examples. In short, it was infinite love, which made and redeemed, which supports and rules the world. That soul, therefore, which is animated with holy love, possesses, according to its capacity, the image and life, the blessedness and glory of God himself. In the sublime language of inspiration, it is filled with all the fulness of God; it dwells in God, and God in it; it is one with God and with Christ, as he and his Father are one. But the two other Christian graces, though very necessary in imperfect creatures, yet do not so directly assimilate them to their Creator; for there are no qualities in God, which resemble faith and hope in man; the perfect knowledge and happiness of Deity exclude from his nature the existence of both.

As our subject is in its own nature practical, there is less need of a formal application. We shall therefore close with a few short inferences, founded upon its leading branches.

If charity be superior to ceremonial institutions, let us ever regard and improve them accordingly. Let us perform the duties of private and public worship, as

expressions and instruments of real goodness. Let us never think there is any virtue in the mere formality of devotion; much less in using it, as a compensation or license for the want or the violation of charity. Prayer without good affections and good works is a vain, yea a polluted sacrifice. It is remarkable that the main spirit of our Lord's prescribed pattern of devotion breathes and enforces pious and virtuous affection. By teaching us to call God *our Father*, it inculcates filial love and conformity to him, and brotherly affection to all his children. By instructing us to pray for the universal sanctification of his name, extension of his kingdom, and fulfilment of his will, it forcibly inculcates not only piety, but universal benevolence. By obliging us to profess forgiveness of injuries, it binds us to love and do good even to enemies, and thus to be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. How deplorably then is the duty of prayer defeated and perverted, if instead of sincerely expressing and promoting a spirit of universal goodness, it nourishes sour bigotry, malignant superstition, pharisaical pride, sordid selfishness; or encourages us to omit substantial moral duties! Let us then worship God in secret and with our families, let us observe the Sabbath and attend the peculiar ordinances of our religion, with a leading desire to attain the great end of these duties. Let us not despise or neglect these institutions, because some others attend them in a useless or hypocritical manner. Let us remember, that in the present state of man, and by the wise appointment of God, these observances are indispensable symbols, guards, and promoters both of virtue and piety.

Again. If charity be greater than even miraculous gifts, this should prevent our indulging envy or discontent on account of our inferiority to the primitive Chris-

tians in respect of these extraordinary communications. It should awaken our gratitude and joy to reflect that, though we are denied these vouchsafements, which are now unnecessary, we may still possess that real goodness, which is the principal thing. The most weak and illiterate true Christian may well be contented and joyful, when he considers, that though he wants those splendid gifts of nature and science, which adorn some characters around him, he possesses something infinitely more noble and happy; that he is far greater in the sight of God, and of all good judges, than the most favoured son of genius and learning, who is a stranger to Christian virtue. Persons of the highest intellectual accomplishments have also great reason for humility and candour, when they consider, that some of their most obscure neighbours or meanest domestics may probably excel them in that goodness, which constitutes real greatness.

Finally. If charity be so far superior even to gospel faith and hope, let none of us rest in any appearance of the two latter, to the neglect of the former. Let us remember, that the most orthodox faith will only condemn us, if our hearts and lives contradict and disgrace it; that a zealous profession of the doctrines of evangelical grace and holiness will only convict us of odious inconsistence and hypocrisy, and enhance our future punishment, if we practically exhibit an ungracious and unholy disposition.

Let us, on the one hand, avoid the dangerous extreme of exalting charity on the ruins of faith; or of supposing it a matter of indifference whether we believe the gospel or not, if we are but candid, decent, and blameless in our lives. As a guard against this error, let us remember that a man's real character is mainly formed by his prevailing belief; that the gospel, and

faith in it are the instruments appointed by God for recovering us to real goodness; that if we reject this divine religion, we not only lose its offered blessings and incur its threatened punishment, but prove ourselves destitute of that charity, which we fondly substitute in its room.

But while we profess to believe and hope in the gospel, let us justify our profession by its fruits. Let our Christian knowledge, belief, and hope, produce and nourish Christian love, with all its benign and happy effects. Let us embrace in the arms of our charity every professed believer, who appears to love God and his neighbour, even though his creed, or his hope, be not so correct or so stable as our own. By cherishing in ourselves and in all around us this heavenly temper, let us endeavour to make the Christian church on earth resemble, as nearly as possible, the kingdom of heaven. In this way, let us be ripening for that world, where our present imperfect gifts and graces shall be lost or completed in perfect light, enjoyment, and charity.

## Sermon VIII.

# On the Vices of the Tongue.

JAMES iii. 8.

*But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*

THE apostle in this chapter gives a lively representation of the unbounded guilt and mischief produced by the tongue. He compares the mighty and extensive influence of this little member to that of bits in the mouth of the horse, of the small helm, which commands the greatest ships, and of a little fire spreading into a devouring flame.

These similies are equally just and strong. For as the tongue, when duly governed, like a bridle or a helm, has a beneficent and commanding influence on the whole body, or on the general course of human action; so a tongue loosened from moral restraint leads to dreadful consequences, resembling those of giving the reins to the unbroken steed, of neglecting the rudder in the midst of rocks and tempests, or of letting a fire rage uncontrolled amid a large collection of combustible materials. Having previously observed, that the most fierce and venomous brutes have been tamed by mankind, he adds, in the text; "But the tongue can no man tame;" that is, either no man can subdue his own tongue in a perfect manner, or by his own independent power and skill; or none can tame the licentious lips of others, so as entirely to check the breath of

slander and falsehood, of obscenity and profaneness. "It is an unruly evil," which breaks over the strongest barriers—"full of deadly poison;" ever ready to infect and kill the reputation, virtue, and comfort of all within its reach.

The words thus explained lead us to enumerate and reprove the most common and glaring instances of this unruly and destructive evil. Though the apostle tells us that no man can tame it, this should not discourage the friends and teachers of religion from attempting the necessary, though arduous task; for with God all things are possible; he has commanded us to warn the wicked; and he often blesses his own institutions for the conversion of his enemies as well, as the edification of his friends.

The most prevalent and pernicious examples of an ungoverned tongue are those, which follow.

First. Profane discourse. This comprehends an unmeaning, irreverent, or wanton use of the name of God, on trivial occasions; to embellish the sallies of wit; to give expression and force to the vehemence of passion; to add new credit to assertions or promises; to impress awe and submission on servants or inferiors; or to display a spirit of independence, and a superiority to vulgar superstition. It also includes that more timid or implied profanity, which, though restrained by law, or by character, by some regard to friends or to conscience, from explicit irreverence or imprecation, is yet fond of lisping or abridging the language of impiety, and often steps on the borders of an oath, by transgressing the limits of simple affirmation or denial! Are there any tongues in this assembly, which answer to either of these descriptions? I must faithfully admonish their owners, that they possess and are diffusing a poisonous and destructive evil. Their profane conversation is a

dishonour to themselves, an injury to their companions, an outrage to society, and an affront to their Maker.

It is a dishonour to themselves, as it proclaims both their folly and rudeness. It certainly discovers a foolish and empty mind to introduce the most awful names and protestations to sanction trifles, to supply the want of sentiment, or to fill up the gaps of discourse. This practice is also foolish, as it has no plausible motive or excuse. It gratifies no constitutional appetite or passion. It procures no advantage, pleasure, or glory. It displays no politeness or liberality. On the contrary, it offends all decent company by its coarseness and barbarity. It insults the feelings, sentiments, and institutions of civilized men, but especially the religion and laws of every Christian community. It operates as a mortal pestilence to society by corrupting its moral and religious character, and thus subverting its order and welfare, and drawing down upon it the curse of Heaven. It is a deadly poison both to the state and the church by gradually extinguishing all reverence for the oaths of the former, and the sacred institutions of the latter.

The profane swearer likewise unspeakably injures his associates, by depraving their moral faculties and feelings, or by lightly uttering against them the most dreadful imprecations. He also commits practical suicide, either by directly wishing the curse of God on his own head, or by boldly challenging his almighty vengeance. He offers the greatest abuse to the name and attributes of Deity, by making them the expletives, the ornaments, or the attestations of every wanton or passionate effusion. He virtually and openly abjures his Christian baptism, and proclaims himself an infidel and a heathen. Agreeably, when Peter was charged with being a disciple of Jesus, he in the hour of trial resorted to cursing and swearing, as a confutation of the charge. By this

kind of speech, so opposite to the known practice of Christ's followers, he effectually denied his blessed Master. I have heard of young men in our own country, who having enjoyed a Christian education, and being removed from the eye and authority of pious parents and friends, have eagerly adopted the same method to convince their new associates of their sudden triumph over early prejudice and bigotry! Let these united considerations prevail to banish from our discourse, from our houses and our streets, this most foolish, inexcusable and detestable vice. Let none plead the force of habit as an excuse for continuing it. Those, who are most addicted to it, can easily refrain from committing it in the presence of a fellow being, whom they respect. Shall not the constant presence of GOD have equal effect? The most abandoned swearer would instantly renounce the practice, were he sure of losing his prostituted tongue the next time it uttered an oath. And shall not the threatening of a far greater punishment from the insulted Majesty of heaven have equal force in reforming offenders? Let none shelter themselves under the authority of modern example. Blessed be GOD, profaneness is not the fashionable style of New England. It is only the dialect of the most uncultivated, stupid, or profligate citizens. Let us scorn both the society and manners of such low beings, and aspire to the fellowship and imitation of those excellent ones of the earth, who reverence, love, and obey their Creator.

II. A Second evil of the tongue is scoffing at religion, or ridiculing her sacred doctrines and institutions. Those who practically neglect, or secretly hate and despise Christianity, frequently resort to this practice in their own defence, and as an easy and striking method

of proving their superior wit, information, or liberality. As they are determined to disregard religion in their conduct, they naturally employ their tongues in justifying this determination. They seek to preserve and strengthen their own character and tranquillity by gaining over their companions to the side of irreligion: and since they cannot effect these purposes by argument, they supply the want of reason by the cheaper commodities of banter and ridicule. It is needless to employ much time in exposing this vile prostitution of speech. That mouth, which reviles or scoffs at sacred things, is eminently entitled to every part of the description, here given of an unruly tongue. "It is a fire, a world of iniquity; it setteth on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell." It is truly full of deadly poison; for it is prompted by a mind fraught with hardened impiety and malignity. It employs the most unfair and wicked means to accomplish the worst end. It diffuses the most fatal and lasting evils. It poisons the springs of human action and comfort. It directly insults GOD, and corrupts his rational creatures. It does the greatest injury to religion and morality, and the highest service to falsehood and wickedness. The person, who derides serious things, must be responsible at last, not only for his personal guilt, but for all that depravity of principle and conduct, which his infectious conversation has propagated to others.

III. A lying tongue is also an unruly and destructive evil. The Bible, and indeed the most approved systems of ethics condemn every species of intentional falsehood. Lying is an offence against the GOD of truth. It is a perversion of the noble gift of speech. It violates the chief bond of social confidence, security, and order. Hence both GOD and man have ranked liars among the most criminal and infamous characters.

They are classed in the Scripture with whoremongers and murderers, and doomed to the same future punishment. Are there any in this audience, to whom this character belongs; any who in their bargains and dealings either magnify things above, or depreciate them below their known value, or in any other respect deviate from the truth, for the sake of worldly advantage; who, when questioned by superiors, deny, extenuate, or conceal facts, which the sacred laws of truth, and the general good, oblige them to reveal; who in their encomiums knowingly ascribe to themselves or others greater talents or acquirements, virtue, or performances, than they are warranted by truth to do, or, in their censures put false or aggravated constructions on the words and actions of their neighbour; who in their promises engage to pay a debt, perform a work, or to do a kindness, when they either do not mean, or have not power to fulfil such engagement, or take no after care either to perform their promise, or seasonably to give notice of their inability; or lastly, who in their common narratives utter fiction or exaggeration in the room of fact, or deliver positive assertions, which are unjustified or contradicted by their own knowledge or persuasion? All, who are guilty in either of these particulars, commit a high offence against GOD, their neighbour, and human society. They resemble that deceitful and malignant spirit, who was a liar from the beginning, and who is justly called the father of lies.

IV. Scurrilous and reproachful language towards those, with whom we are connected, is another instance of an unruly tongue. This our Saviour tells us is a breach of the sixth commandment; it is killing with the tongue. "Whosoever is angry with his brother without cause," and in his passion calls him *Raca*, thou base fellow, or *thou fool*, shall be in danger of GOD's

future vengeance. Christianity requires us to put away all bitterness and wrath, clamour and evil speaking, and to address even our servants and inferiors in the language of tenderness and benignity. The reverse of this is both inhuman and unchristian. Those, who freely dispense to those around them reproachful names and epithets, should consider that the persons, whom they thus abuse, have the same common nature, Father and Redeemer with themselves; that they may possibly inherit as much sense, integrity, and goodness; that if they are subject to bodily or mental infirmities, to outward poverty and meanness, it is GOD, who has thus subjected them; and if we deride them on these accounts, we reproach their Creator. Let us further consider, that many, who are visibly low and obscure, are rich in faith and holiness, and of course honourable in the eyes of GOD, and therefore ought to be respected by us. In short, contemptuous and bitter language is not only improper, but always useless and hurtful. It never commands that hearty respect and obedience from our inferiors, which an opposite treatment secures. It sinks the character and authority of those, who use it; while it fixes a deep wound and perhaps a lasting enmity in the bosoms of those who receive it. If reproachful words are thus indecorous and criminal in superiors towards persons placed beneath them; they are still more heinous when used by the latter towards the former. What an outrage against nature, decency, and virtue, for children to treat their parents, especially when aged, with the language of disrespect or contempt! How shocking for the child, or the youth to behave himself proudly against the ancient; or the base against the honourable; or for subjects on every slight occasion to revile their rulers!

Nearly related to this particular are the several forms of evil speaking, for instance, uttering things to the disadvantage of absent persons without any necessity or prospect of utility; uncharitably censuring their actions, character, or state, or disturbing the harmony and comfort of families and neighbourhoods by officiously intermeddling with their concerns, by meanly prying into their transactions and secrets, and eagerly propagating and commenting upon them. This practice describes the whole company of *tatlers and busy bodies*, whom the apostle reproves with an air of mingled abhorrence and indignation. There is likewise a *foolish talking and jesting*, which St. Paul mentions as unbecoming the Christian character. Jesting or humorous discourse is not criminal, when employed merely for harmless and needful relaxation, or when used to chastise folly, error, and vice. But it is always sinful and injurious, when it is made the vehicle and promoter of levity or scandal, of infidelity or profaneness, of malice or obscenity.

This brings us to a *fifth and last* instance of an unruly tongue, viz, *filthy communication.* This sin is peculiarly shameless, corrupting and infectious. It wages war with natural modesty, civil decorum, and Christian purity. It is a high offence against the pure nature and law of GOD. It evinces and increases the moral pollution and vileness of the offender. It eminently disqualifies him for the pure exercises of religion, and the holy entertainments of heaven. Like a moral poison, it conveys an impure and destructive contagion to others. It has greater influence in the propagation of vice, than perhaps any other kind of evil discourse. Hence St. Paul charges Christians, that uncleanness be not once *named* among them; he exhorts them to put it away *from their mouths* as well, as from their practice.

Having enumerated the principal evils of a licentious tongue, I will close with some general rules for the due government of our speech.

1. Let us see that our hearts be truly and thoroughly sanctified. It is from the evil treasure of the heart, that the evil things above specified are produced. If the law of holy love to GOD and men were written in our hearts; if we were constantly governed by it, as a living, all controlling principle; we should not, we could not, willingly offend either the one or the other, with our lips: we could not indulge, nor even endure, the language of impiety or falsehood, of slander or reproach: it would not be a burdensome task, but our delight and glory to restrict our discourse within the bounds of Christian sobriety, benevolence, and piety. Our hearts being seasoned with grace, our speech would naturally be savory and edifying. Let it then be our first, our most anxious concern, that this inward fountain of our words and actions be purified by the word and spirit of GOD.

2. In dependence on divine grace let us enter into a solemn resolution and covenant against the sins above reproved, and all others connected with them. Let us adopt and bind on our souls David's vow, Ps. xxxix. 12. Let us make, and daily renew this engagement, in the presence and strength of Almighty GOD, without any equivocation or mental reserve. In this way we shall erect, and continually fortify a strong hold against temptation.

3. Let us studiously avoid evil company. We insensibly slide into a resemblance of our associates. This is remarkably verified in the facility, with which young persons of the most pious education catch the profane or indecent language of licentious companions. Let me then affectionately caution the children and youth of

this assembly to have no friendship, nor even society, with the ungodly and dissolute. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Enter not into the path of the wicked; avoid it; pass not by it; turn from it, and pass away, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul." Let us also, who are parents and heads of families, use the greatest vigilance and authority in keeping our children, domestics, and houses pure from the dreadful contagion of evil company and conversation. Otherwise our personal examples and instructions, however excellent, will probably have but little effect.

4. Let us form a habit of deliberating, and seriously reviewing our thoughts, before we give them utterance. The author of the Psalms repeatedly mentions with contrition what he had spoken in his haste. Moses, that pattern of meekness, once "spake unadvisedly with his lips," and forfeited Canaan by it, because he did not solemnly reflect, before he expressed his feelings. Most of us have probably transgressed in a similar manner. Let this teach us the needful lesson of correcting our first impressions by deliberate reflection, before we give them the sanction of our lips. Let us likewise often meditate on the strict account which is kept of our vain and sinful speeches, by our omniscient Judge. He has assured us that for every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment. Let us habituate ourselves to reflect with a tender conscience on our daily discourse, and to humble ourselves in the presence of GOD for every offensive or unguarded word, which escapes us. Finally, let us by fervent and constant prayer put ourselves under the gracious conduct and protection of Heaven: Let us daily offer the petition of David—"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips."

Let me especially recommend these friendly counsels to the rising generation. Begin early, my young friends, to devote your hearts, and lips, and lives to your Creator. Let your mouths be early accustomed to the language of purity and devotion, if you would hope to join in the holy conversation and praises of heaven; for there shall in no wise enter into that blessed place any thing that worketh, or speaketh abomination.

# Sermon IX.

## The Character of a Wise Man.

PSALM iii. 10.

*The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.*

WISDOM is a quality so honourable, that almost every man aspires to the reputation of possessing it; and no character is generally accounted more disgraceful, than that of a fool. Many persons place a greater value upon reputed wisdom, than exemplary honesty, and esteem it a more grievous reproach to be taxed with weakness of understanding, than with badness of morals. But in the unerring judgment of Heaven, no man merits the appellation of *wise*, who is not truly good; for, says the text, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."

The fear of the Lord, in the scriptural style, is but another name for the principle and practice of piety. It imports such affectionate veneration for the Most High, as produces a filial and effectual fear of offending him by disobedience, and prompts the most tender and earnest endeavours to please and to honour him. It therefore includes the whole of virtue, at least in its inward spirit, or commanding principle. When this fear of God is called the *beginning* of wisdom, the idea is, that true piety is the first principle, or the highest ingredient of genuine wisdom.

The text, therefore, directly leads us to illustrate, confirm, and apply the following proposition.

He, and he only is a wise man, who regulates his heart and life by the doctrines and precepts of religion.

The man of religion acts upon these two great principles, *First*, that there is a God, who made and governs the world; and *Secondly*, that this Supreme Ruler will reward or punish men in a future state for their moral behaviour in the present. We must add, that the pious and virtuous man, if favoured with the light of revelation, will also pay a sacred practical attention to the peculiar doctrines, duties, and motives of Christianity. Deeply impressed with the momentous discoveries presented to him by reason and scripture, he feels it to be his great interest, and makes it his supreme care so to conduct in this world, as to secure everlasting happiness in the next. Does not every rational mind instantly perceive and applaud the wisdom of such a character? Does it not pronounce the opposite to be a display of egregious folly?

But in order to place this subject in the most forcible point of view, we will make three different suppositions respecting the principles, on which the behaviour of the virtuous man proceeds; and we shall find that on either of those suppositions he acts a far wiser part, than the practical unbeliever. The great principles of natural and revealed religion may, for the sake of illustration, be considered either as false or doubtful, or as certainly true.

*In the first place*, if we suppose for a few moments these principles to be false, as infidels and atheists pretend; yet in this case the man of piety and virtue ultimately loses nothing by his goodness, but evidently has the advantage. For his belief in God and providence, his contemplation and hope of immortality, though not finally realized, are a source of unspeakable comfort and benefit to him in the present state. They spread light, harmony, and beauty over the face of the natural and

moral world, which to the eye of atheistical philosophy present nothing but dark and chaotic confusion. The sentiment of a Deity and a future state gives a noble expansion and elevation to the soul; it enlarges the understanding, delights the imagination, and rejoices the heart. It heightens all our innocent enjoyments, and inspires fortitude, serenity, and triumph under the pressure of outward calamity. It gives vigour, stability, and pleasure to the practice of those virtues, which contribute to health and peace, to reputation and competence.

1. The man of religious principles and strict morals has vastly the advantage of the opposite character in respect to *health*, that prime source of temporal happiness. Religious virtue, comprising habitual temperance, charity, and devotion, and implying a well regulated, calm, and cheerful spirit, is exceedingly friendly to the regular, vigorous and happy tone of our bodies: as Solomon emphatically expresses it, it is *health to the flesh, and marrow to the bones.* But vicious passions and indulgences, a disordered heart, and an idle, intemperate, licentious life, waste the animal constitution, and yield the body a prey to disease and pain, and frequently to untimely dissolution.

2. Religious wisdom is the parent of mental *tranquillity;* while uneasiness and anxiety are the inseparable fruit and curse of sinful propensities. View the man, who is devoted to sensuality, ambition, or avarice. He must rise early, sit up late, pursue his dark design, with cautious and persevering labour, with a fearful and misgiving mind; he must invent and practise a thousand expedients to accomplish and to disguise his unworthy object: while the honest, humble, contented child of virtue is good and pious at a much easier rate. He feels safe and confident in his own integrity. Conscious of his own uprightness and worth, he feels no necessity

either of carefully concealing or officiously displaying his character. He needs no expense of anxious labour to save or set off appearances. He resembles the sun in the heavens, who shines without taking artificial pains to shine, and who employs no effort or disguise to convince the world that he is not a dark, but a luminous body.

The difference between the vicious and the virtuous man, in respect to internal peace, is inexpressible. The former, let his outward circumstances be ever so easy and flourishing, is like the troubled sea, which cannot rest. His mind is daily agitated by guilty, ungoverned, or discordant passions; it is either swelled by pride, corroded by envy, torn by anger, inflamed by lust, or consumed by revenge. These and similar emotions, with their criminal and calamitous effects, not only immediately operate to banish self-enjoyment, and produce inward tumult and agony, but they arm against the offender the bitter reproaches of his own reason and conscience. On the other hand, true virtue, by subduing and harmonizing the inferior powers, gives the mind a serene enjoyment of itself, and of every object around it; it inspires that noble firmness, that heart-felt joy, which arises from self approbation.

3. The fear of the Lord confers a great advantage in point of *reputation*. However degenerate the world is, it cannot withhold its esteem and even veneration from the just and faithful man, whose whole conduct proclaims, that he acts from principle, that he religiously abhors whatever is base and dishonest. It cannot refuse its respect to the man of exemplary sobriety, who triumphs over every vicious propensity, over every temptation to forbidden indulgence. Even those who are destitute of virtue, are awed by its majesty, and charmed by its beauty, when they see it strongly reflect-

ed from the conduct of its votaries. On the other hand, contempt and infamy are the general lot of the wicked. What objects of scorn and detestation are the sons of falsehood and knavery, of intemperance and debauchery! Familiar intercourse with such persons is shunned, as reproachful and contaminating, by every man of decency and reputation; even their occasional society is painful to delicate and virtuous minds. In short, few men are so insensible to the lustre of virtue, as not to covet the honour which attends it, and thousands pay homage to it, by assuming the garb, and aspiring to the credit of it, while their evil propensities hinder them from cordially espousing its interest. This reputation, which accompanies goodness, is at once an unspeakable pleasure and advantage to its possessor; while the shame, attendant on vice, is a most poignant evil.

I am aware of a plausible objection to this assertion, founded on those words of St. Paul, "If in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." This passage has been understood by many, as a declaration, that the most virtuous Christians would be the most wretched of mankind, if they had no hope of a better life, or if this hope should prove delusive. But the connexion plainly limits this text to the first professors and ministers of Christianity, and particularly to the apostles, whose sufferings for the gospel were extraordinary and unceasing. It has therefore no reference to the subject in discussion. Besides, if these Christian teachers did not really believe and hope in a future life, they must have been the most impious and cruel impostors; all their preaching and conduct must have been founded on a wicked and illusory scheme of pretended doctrines and facts, and calculated to seduce thousands of their fellow men into poverty, disgrace, and ruin in this world, in the chimerical hope

of endless but imaginary felicity in the next; consequently, instead of being the most virtuous, they were really the most abandoned of human beings, and their inward guilt and horror of conscience, added to their worldly sacrifices and sufferings, might well render them of all men the most miserable. But how does this apply to those, who are truly honest in their religious profession and practice? We may add, St. Paul is evidently describing those, whose belief and expressions are wholly confined to this life; but our preceding argument has proceeded in part on the idea, that the virtuous man has some hope in a future existence, though this hope is supposed to be unfounded. If the belief of God and immortality were entirely discarded, we grant that genuine religious virtue, and the consolation produced by it, could not exist; what we now call morality would become mere worldly policy, or the dictate of self interest; yet even then it would be far better both for individual and social enjoyment to be visibly temperate, just and beneficent, than the reverse.

Lastly, The man of religious virtue has the advantage of the opposite character in regard to *temporal profit*. For the esteem and confidence, which he possesses, are exceedingly favourable to his worldly business and success. Many branches of virtue naturally tend to competence, and in some cases to affluence; such as temperance and industry, frugality and moderation, justice and integrity.

It appears then that the pious and virtuous man acts a wiser part than the practical infidel, even on the most unfavourable hypothesis, or on supposition that religion is but a delusion; for in ordinary cases he secures a much greater portion of present felicity.

This part of our subject would be much strengthened, had we time to apply it to social man, or to compare the

opposite effects accruing to civil society from the practical influence of religious and moral, or of irreligious and demoralizing principles. A view of these contrasted effects would add an unspeakable preponderance to the side of religion, by showing its immense advantages to communities as such, and of course to the several individuals, who compose them. But waving so extensive a contemplation, to which your own experience, observation, and reflection will readily do justice, I hasten to the

*Second supposition* stated above, which considers the principles of religion as *doubtful*, that is, as possible, or at most probable, but not certain. On this supposition the man, who practically regards them, still more evidently acts the wiser part, for he chooses the *safest side;* he runs no risk, though his belief and consequent practice should eventually prove erroneous; whereas the unbeliever runs the hazard of final perdition. The pious man gains eternal happiness, if natural and revealed religion be true; but the infidel gains nothing, though his opinion should finally prove correct. No wise man would needlessly expose himself to the bare possibility of losing a state of endless blessedness, and of incurring everlasting punishment. If therefore a future retribution be only possible, and certainly no infidel can demonstrate the contrary, they who deride or practically disregard it, they who live as if such a state were certainly a chimera, are in the view of common sense, the most desperate fools and madmen. This charge of folly is greatly heightened, if we suppose that religion is attended with some degree of *probability*. Now the single fact, that all nations and ages have concurred in embracing its leading principles, affords probable evidence of its truth; since no falsehood of so interesting a nature ever was or can be imposed upon all nations and

descriptions of men, so distant from each other in situation, manners, interests, understandings, and dispositions; especially since the most improved energies of the human mind, exerted on this subject, have never been able to detect the falsehood. A thousand other probabilities might be adduced on the side of religion.

But supposing for the present that it is probably true, the wisdom of believing and obeying it will readily and strongly appear. No man, in his temporal concerns, waits for intuitive or mathematical certainty to govern his faith and practice; but he founds both on preponderating evidence. Almost the whole business and commerce of mankind are necessarily and successfully conducted upon this principle, or upon such evidence as the nature of the case admits and demands. Now where our eternal interest is in question, a smaller probability should determine us against risking or losing it, than would be necessary in a merely temporal concern; for the more important any interest is, the more cautious should we be against putting it to hazard; the least probability of danger in this case should be watchfully precluded. Suppose on the one side there is a possibility that future retribution may never take place; yet if this should be the fact, the religious man sustains only this inconvenience, that he did not give an unbounded licence to his sensual pleasures, but subjected them to the probable, though imaginary belief of immortality; but even this self-denying regulation of appetite and passion gave him more ease, more present satisfaction and benefit, than unlimited indulgence could possibly afford. But on the other side, it is highly probable, that there will be a future state; and in this event how miserable will be the practical unbeliever! In the mean time, the apprehension of such an issue must greatly mar his present enjoyments.

Let us now, in the

*Third place*, proceed upon the supposition, that the great principles of religion are *certainly true*. We shall not at present support *this* hypothesis by formal proof. It is sufficient to observe, that the existence of an unoriginated and eternal, a designing and all powerful cause, is demonstrably certain from visible nature. The moral attributes, government, and final retribution of this great Being, may be satisfactorily inferred from his natural perfections, and from the present phenomena of the moral world. The truth of revealed religion is also clearly proved by past and present appearances, by abundant historic evidence of the leading facts recorded in the gospel, and by the early and continued propagation, monuments, and beneficent effects of the Christian revelation.

Now the religious man wisely believes and conducts according to this evidence. He perceives upon sober inquiry, that GOD and virtue, that the Bible and eternity are names, which stand for the most solemn realities; he therefore habitually treats them as such; he continually lives to his Maker and Redeemer, to virtue and immortality. That such conduct is emphatically wise, will more fully appear, if we consider that it possesses all the characteristics of true wisdom. It implies a correct discernment and choice of our *supreme good*. As religion, especially Christianity, informs us of our highest interest and end, and of the only means to attain it; so the real Christian discerns and embraces that infinite good, which revelation sets before him. But irreligious men universally fail in this capital point; they propose some finite, sensitive, or imaginary felicity, and mistake this airy phantom for true blessedness; and though every experiment shows them that the object of their pursuit is but a deceitful shadow, yet they court it afresh

with redoubled ardour. Justly therefore does the Psalmist exclaim, "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" This question implies that habitual sinners, however learned or apparently wise, know nothing in a right manner, or to valuable purpose. They have no realizing and practical knowledge either of God, or the Saviour, of sin or duty, of this world or the next, or even of their own frame, condition, and prospect.

Further, the religious man discerns and adopts *the proper means* for securing his chief good. He aims to please and enjoy God, by imitating and obeying him. He prepares to see Christ as he is, by endeavouring to be like him. He seeks for a pure and holy heaven, by cultivating a pure heart and a holy practice in the present state. He seeks after the gospel salvation, in the gospel way, in the way of evangelical faith, repentance and obedience. But every wicked man, who pretends to believe in religion, neglects the only right path to his professed object. He ostensibly pursues and expects eternal happiness, but what means does he use to attain it? He seeks it either by a round of cold external worship or morality, or by inward faith, reliance, or rapturous feelings; while he omits, yea, secretly hates that self-denying, practical, and universal holiness, without which both reason and Scripture declare he cannot see the Lord. What monstrous infatuation, to seek and hope for everlasting felicity without possessing or even labouring after those moral qualities, which must fit him to enjoy it, and which go to constitute the happiness itself!

Lastly, the crowning property of wisdom is a *vigorous application* of the means, which lead to our end. This forms the greatest line of difference between the sincere and nominal Christian; the one diligently applies his knowledge to practice; the other, with the same price

in his hands to get wisdom, is too thoughtless and indolent to improve it. In temporal affairs men easily and practically distinguish between a small and great, a momentary and durable advantage, and readily resign the former to the latter; but foolish sinners in their highest concerns reverse this rule of action; they sacrifice an invaluable and endless good to some trivial and transient interest or pleasure. How careful is worldly wisdom to observe and seize the fittest opportunities for promoting its object! But how negligent are sinners of their peculiar advantages and seasons for gaining the true riches! How carelessly do they waste the flower of their lives! How many sabbaths and sermons, how many natural gifts and providential warnings, how many tender, serious, and promising moments are trifled away! While common prudence urges men to get their earthly property secured by a firm and certain title; how unconcerned are the wicked about the nature of their title to an incorruptible inheritance! While the principle of self preservation is ever alive to temporal danger, and full of earnest activity in guarding against it; how slow are sinners to feel and avoid their constant danger of eternal perdition!

These observations sufficiently illustrate the folly of a sinful, and the wisdom of a religious life.

Our subject, in review, shows us in a strong light the moral depravity of the human mind. The same natural faculties and principles, which enable and dispose men to act wisely in their temporal affairs, would lead to an equally wise conduct in their eternal concerns, if they were not strongly perverted. The same reason and prudence, which make them provident and active for their bodily and secular welfare, would render them still more discreet and vigilant in securing their immortal happiness, if some awful infatuation had not seized

their minds. What other reason can be assigned for the direct opposition between the arguments, feelings, and conduct of those, who despise or neglect religion, and the principles and behaviour of the same persons with respect to all other subjects? We find that infidels and libertines will even glory in advancing such objections against religion, and such pleas for neglecting it, as even they would be ashamed to employ on any other topic.

We find too that thousands, who professedly believe in religion, indulge and even justify a practice so contrary to their profession, as to discover the greatest moral stupidity and madness. How shocking is it for reasonable beings, in their highest concerns, to profess and to act in such a manner, that their avowed principles and actions perpetually contradict and reproach each other! How absurd, for men to excuse their present inconsistent conduct by the purpose of future amendment? Does not this very purpose imply a present conviction of folly, and yet a resolution to continue in it? Does it not likewise imply a bold presumption on some future opportunity, disposition, and ability to repent? Yet no man in his senses will pretend to be certain of either of these futurities. These and similar facts, which we daily see and feel, cannot be accounted for without admitting the scripture doctrine of human depravity. Sound philosophy teaches, that no other cause is adequate to such uniform and dreadful effects.

Again, with what an ill grace do irreligious men ridicule serious and exemplary Christians, as foolish and distracted visionaries! If our text, and the general tenour of the Bible be true; yea, if natural religion have any reality or even probability; every habitual sinner, however sagacious or refined, is a fool; and every pious man, however weak in other respects, in the noblest sense is wise. The former, therefore, is a just object of

contempt, and the latter of veneration. Persons of the first class, instead of glorying in their own wisdom or liberality, and vilifying those, who shun their foolish and destructive paths, ought rather to despise and abhor themselves. Instead of reproaching religion, as making men whimsical or mad, they ought to revere it, as that which eminently exalts and perfects the human character. Instead of fearing to embrace it, lest it should contract their minds, or sink their spirits, they should eagerly repair to it, as the best source of rational improvement and comfort; for happy is the man that findeth this wisdom, and the man who getteth this understanding.

Finally, Let good men, however poor and illiterate, afflicted or despised, be comforted and animated by the thought, that they have made a wise and happy choice, and that their wisdom will ere long be confessed and rewarded in the view of the assembled universe. In the mean time let such highly favoured souls pity, and labour to reform an infatuated world. Let them endeavour to bring their sinful neighbours, and especially their beloved children and friends, to that knowledge and fear of the Lord, which is the perfection of wisdom. Let them earnestly pray and hope for that blessed day, when the doctrine and spirit of the gospel shall impart true wisdom, virtue, and joy to the whole family of mankind.

# Sermon X.

## On the Pleasures of Religion.

PROV. XXIV. 13, 14.

*My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste: so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to thy soul. When thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.*

THE main design of the Sacred Scriptures is to lead men to the knowledge, love, and practice of true piety and virtue, and thereby to advance them to the proper perfection and felicity of their nature. This is eminently the scope of the book of Proverbs, and of the words just recited in particular; in which the wise and inspired Solomon most pathetically urges mankind, especially the young, to the acquisition of wisdom, or true religion, and enforces the exhortation by representing the sweetness and pleasantness of it. This he beautifully illustrates and recommends by the simile of honey and the honeycomb, than which nothing was sweeter or more delightful to the taste; and one of the principal excellencies of Canaan, that glory of all lands, was, that it flowed with milk and honey. By representing the pleasantness of religion, therefore, by this comparison, he intimates that the enjoyment of it will afford the highest satisfaction and the most exquisite delight.

The text presents this important observation, that true religion is worthy of our earnest desire and pursuit, not only on account of its future and endless re-

ward, but also for the sake of the pleasure and satisfaction, which immediately attend it.

By true religion, in this discourse, we intend, not the religion of the superstitious Pharisee, the sour bigot, or the wild enthusiast; but the rational, fervent, and practical piety of the sincere Christian; or such a just and impressive sense of the Deity, as suitably influences both the heart and the conduct; as engages the subject to a cheerful and steady performance of the various duties, he owes to his Creator, to his Redeemer, to his fellow-creatures, and to himself.

Now it is easy to show that religion, in this rational and scriptural view of it, is indeed sweeter than honey, or the honeycomb; or that it is an immediate source of the most pure and exalted pleasures.

To pre-engage your attention to this proposition, let me observe, that there is no one artifice, by which the father of lies, the grand deceiver and destroyer of men, has more successfully promoted his cause, than by painting religion in a gloomy and forbidding attitude, and hereby prejudicing mankind, especially the young, against this apprehended dreadful foe to human comfort and delight. And many of Satan's children have industriously laboured to strengthen this prejudice, by clothing religion in the most disgusting and frightful dress; by describing it as a compound of vulgar superstition and priestly deception; of needless scrupularity and monkish austerity; while some of its honest but misjudging friends have unhappily contributed to the same prejudice, by carrying into their religious system a rigid and morose, or a melancholy and desponding spirit.

The public teachers of religion, therefore, cannot do it more important service, than by vindicating it from those false and injurious aspersions; and holding it up in its native and attractive charms, as the soul of human

happiness. Let me then request the candid attention of all, and PARTICULARLY OF THE YOUTHFUL PART OF THIS AUDIENCE, while we attempt to illustrate the sweetness of religion.

*In the first place,* religion gives us the best enjoyment of our temporal blessings; for it teaches, or includes a right estimation, and the wisest improvement of them; which is the directest way to extract and enjoy their sweetness. It subdues that immoderate estimation of temporal good, which forever hinders the true enjoyment of it; which creates a feverish ardour, a tormenting impatience in pursuing it, a slavish anxiety in possessing it, disappointment and loathing in the fruition, and vexatious uneasiness in the loss of it. Religious wisdom dictates a rational, calm, and temperate use of the bounties of Heaven. It enables us to enjoy them without satiety, and to possess them without anxiety; to seek them without impatience, and to lose them without despair. It greatly enlarges the sphere, and improves the relish, of our common enjoyments; for it keeps both body and mind in a right posture for them; it elevates and crowns the pleasure, which they naturally afford, by bringing to the entertainment a sound, incorrupt mind, a thankful, contented, and cheerful heart; a heart, which adores and enjoys God in all these streams of his beneficence. Thus it adds intellectual and spiritual to earthly joys, and gives a pure, sentimental fruition of the most common objects and enjoyments.

What a rich flavour must this impart to all the blessings, with which we are loaded; to the various sweets of health and ease, of food and raiment, of rest and security; to the satisfaction resulting from agreeable connexions, delicate friendship, peaceful habitations, prosperous business; to the pleasure, which we take in be-

holding the shining sun, the descending rain, the flowers of spring, the ripened stores of summer and autumn! How is the delight of all these unspeakably heightened, when we see them all streaming down to us from the overflowing goodness of a generous, affectionate Friend, who regards us with wonderful kindness, and to whom our hearts are supremely attached! What sweetness must this infuse into our daily pleasures and our nightly slumbers. "Thou hast put gladness in my heart," says an ancient saint, "more, than in the time, when their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety."

*In the second place*, religion denies us no pleasure, but such as directly tends to sorrow. The gratifications, which it prohibits, are either very sordid and polluting, or very dangerous and destructive. What we commonly call unlawful pleasures, are many of them enjoyments in themselves innocent and useful, but procured by unwarrantable means, or enjoyed in a wrong manner; that is, either obtained by injustice, or abused by intemperance. But certainly neither injustice, nor intemperance has any real pleasure annexed to it. On the contrary, unless a man have a very unnatural temper of mind and body, injustice must be painful to the former as well, as intemperance to the latter. Those pleasures, then, which men seek, and fancy they enjoy, under the banner of vice, may be equally found, yea enjoyed with great advantage, under the standard and regulations of Christian virtue. And if religion forbids to her votaries drunkenness and uncleanness, falsehood and unrighteousness, envy and slander, malice and revenge; it is because these vices would deprive them of true pleasure, and subject them to constant pain, even

in this world as well, as incapacitate them for happiness, and ripen them for misery in the next.

*In the third place*, as religion forbids no real pleasure, so it brings no peculiar trouble. In other words, no trouble is the proper and genuine effect of religion.

The love of God and our neighbour, which is a compend of human duty, far from being the natural parent of sorrow, is the pleasantest disposition, of which the mind of man is capable. None will pretend that devotion toward God, or charity to men, tends to the injury of body, mind, or estate; while sacrificing to worldly and fleshly idols has an unfavourable operation upon each. No man can pretend, that a genuine trust in Christ produces such shameful and vexatious disappointments, as commonly flow from earthly and carnal dependencies; or that Christian sobriety ever leads to diseases, diligence to poverty, humility to contention, or honesty to shame.

It is granted, that repentance of sin, which is an important branch of Christian duty, carries with it a degree of trouble and uneasiness. But this trouble is not the native fruit of duty, but of sin; for had mankind continued in the perfect exercise of holiness, there would have been no occasion for repentance. Nor is this trouble peculiar to evangelical repentance; for impenitent sinners have consciences, which frequently give them more exquisite anguish, than the deepest humiliation can produce in a believing penitent. Faithless remorse was far more painful to Judas, than godly sorrow to Peter. Besides, there is a rational, a dignified pleasure in mourning for our unworthy treatment of so excellent a character, so generous a Friend, so kind a Father, as the blessed God. There is so much ingenuity and love, so much cheering faith and hope in the divine mercy, in the exercises of gospel repentance, as render it on the whole equally

pleasant and salutary: and while the humble penitent is distressed with a sense of his own baseness, he is proportionably delighted with a view of the beauty and dignity of Jehovah, and comforted with an assurance of his forgiving love. Let us suppose two sinners on the bed of death, or two condemned criminals going to the place of execution. The one exercises a filial, evangelical repentance, a repentance springing from love, and enlivened by gospel faith and hope. The other feels all the pangs of conscious guilt, and all the terrors of his approaching fate, without any cordial affection to that Being, whom he has offended, to that law, which he has violated, and to that Saviour, who offers him forgiveness; and without any cheering confidence in the divine mercy, or a future happy immortality. I ask, which of these two kinds of sorrow is the most comfortable and soothing? Is not the gloomy, despairing sorrow of the last character a dreadful foretaste and beginning of damnation? While the humble and pious repentance of the former is a sweet pledge of future forgiveness and blessedness.

As to the duties of *self-denial* and *mortification*, which Christianity requires, the pain attending these is always the genuine offspring of sin. Nor is this peculiar to the religious character. For the wicked man is often obliged to deny, yea, to suppress one corruption in order to gratify another; his lusts and passions are so opposite and contradictory, as render his soul a Babel of confusion. But Christian mortification strikes at the root of this evil, and gradually restores the mind to a regular, tranquil, and happy state.

With respect to *suffering for righteousness' sake*, to which religion may sometimes call us; not to urge that such sufferings properly originate, not from the Christian spirit, but from an opposite source, and will

be overruled for the good of persecuted saints, and the advancement of the Christian cause; I will only observe, that the faithful soldier of Christ takes a generous delight in suffering for so glorious a Master; and triumphs in the thought, that every reproach, every pang, which he endures for Him here, will be a pearl, an orient diamond in his everlasting crown; and, in the mean time, that his benevolent Leader will afford him succours and consolations, equal and far superior to his sufferings; for these are but human, while the comforts are divine; these are but temporary, while the joy and glory are eternal. Which leads me to add,

*In the fourth place*, While religion brings no trouble, at least without an overbalance of delight, it introduces a new set of pleasures, peculiar to itself; pleasures far nobler, purer, and sweeter, than can arise from any other source. As the soul is the proper seat of happiness, so the felicity of a rational spirit must be derived from spiritual and divine objects. Such objects religion presents for our contemplation and enjoyment; and at the same time disposes the mind for a right entertainment of them.

In the first place, it rectifies and harmonizes the several powers of the soul. The intellectual, moral, and inferior faculties of wicked men are in a vitiated, discordant state, which creates a wild uproar in their breasts. But, when true piety descends into the soul, it rectifies these disorders; it clarifies and brightens the intellect; reduces and regulates the rebellious will and affections; it serenes, it sweetens all the inward powers, and diffuses over them the very dawn of heaven. Pure love now springs up and reigns in the heart; divine contemplation takes ample and bright surveys; gentle meekness enjoys a humble delight; faith leans securely upon the Rock of Ages, and hope with longing eyes beholds

and anticipates the pleasant regions, the full joys of immortality. What sources of godlike pleasure are these. The soul now feels itself in a right, a healthy, and vigorous state; it can sensibly perceive the very image and life of God, in some measure, transfused through its whole constitution. This may seem a strong and bold expression; but inspiration fully warrants it, when it describes good men as "partakers of the divine nature," and "filled with all the fulness of God." What divine pleasure is wrapped up in the idea!

And, as the conscious possession of such a divine temper must be unspeakably pleasing, so must the exercise of it in a series of good actions. It is as much the nature of holiness to be active, as of the sun to shine, of the flame to ascend, or a garden of pleasant spices to send forth a grateful perfume. Now acts of goodness must be delightful, so far at least, as a holy principle is the agent; for such actions being exercises of a holy inclination or appetite, this appetite is gratified, and has a rich entertainment in the performance. Thus it is a noble pleasure to a benevolent heart to do good, and make others as happy as itself; it is a pleasure to the compassionate soul to relieve the wretched, and supply the children of want; it is a pleasure to the pious and devout soul to do the will, and promote the glory of God, and carry on a sacred intercourse with Him by meditation, prayer, and praise, and an attendance on all the institutions of his worship. In short, pleasure waits on every step of a religious life; every virtue, and every act of each virtue, produces an instantaneous satisfaction; nay, the civil and common actions of the good man, being influenced and consecrated by religious principles, are attended with some holy delight.

This pleasure of doing well is an angelic satisfaction. The ministering spirits of God's court above fly with rapture to execute his holy and benevolent orders. It was the meat and drink of our Saviour himself to do his Father's will, and finish his work. "I delight to do thy will, O my God," was his language at his first undertaking the mediatorial office. It is an infinite delight to the great Jehovah to do good; that is, to act like himself. So good men find a degree of the same delight in the exercises of goodness. Thus wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

Farther, to these pleasures of action, religion adds those of *knowledge* and *contemplation*. Many philosophic geniuses have delightfully spent years in contemplating merely natural truths; in diving deep into the secrets of nature, in soaring aloft among the stars, and ranging the wide field of human science; and when some new discoveries have opened to their minds, they seem to have been even ravished and transported. But human science is infinitely beneath divine wisdom. The Christian in contemplation rises to the Being of beings, to the great Original and Sum of truth, and surveys the perfections of nature's supreme Author and Director; surveys the grandeur, power, holiness, goodness, and mercy of the Redeemer, who is the image of the invisible God, and who has, in his person, doctrine, and work, as it were, brought down the Deity, and placed him before us, in a near, familiar, and most engaging light. How exalted the entertainment, which flows from the view of such grand, interesting, salutary truths, as the Son of God has revealed; truths, which proclaim "glory to God in the highest, and peace and good will to men;" which hold up to the anxious, inquiring

mind, both the chief good of man, and the sure way to arrive at the enjoyment of it!

The true knowledge of these great objects is light and life to the soul; our Saviour himself calls it "life eternal." When the soul finds this, it obtains something, in which it can securely and delightfully rest; something, which gives peace to the conscience, and satisfaction to the heart, and which continued will make one happy forever. Oh, what a transporting surprise seizes the mind, when it first savingly beholds the light of evangelical truth! It finds itself in a new and beautiful world! What other subjects of contemplation can yield a pleasure like this! Here the object known is not trivial, uncertain, foreign, or uninteresting to us; but dignified, certain, infinitely interesting, and completely satisfying. And, if the knowledge of wisdom was sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, under the dark dispensation of the Old Testament, how much brighter and sweeter must it be to good men under the full blaze of gospel light.

And the pleasure of this contemplation will be heightened in proportion to their evidence of special interest in the objects and blessings contemplated. It must be dreadful to the thinking mind, while surveying the works and blessings of nature and grace, to reflect, "The great Author of all these is not *my* God!" But what a blessed reflection to the pious soul, to say, with comfortable assurance, "The mighty Lord of the world, who kindled up the sun and stars, poured forth the sea, and balanced the earth, who holds this stupendous universe in the hollow of his hand, and who is rearing up a new world of grace upon the basis of his own Son's death and resurrection; this mighty and glorious Lord is my Father, and all the treasures of his kingdom, both of nature, grace, and glory are mine."

It deserves a distinct mention, that it is a source of great pleasure to the pious Christian to behold the beauty, and enjoy the smiles of Christ, the Mediator.

Christ Jesus is a most wonderful, unparalleled person; possessed at once of all the perfections of Deity, and all the engaging virtues of humanity; infinitely more majestic than the angels, and yet the meekest and most humble man, that ever appeared; he is higher than our conceptions can reach, and yet has stooped beneath the grave, has stooped to receive into his embraces the meanest and worst of mankind. His person and qualities, his instructions and works, are all wonders, and an inexhaustible source of admiring, rapturous entertainment to the contemplative Christian. This mysterious, glorious person is the believer's friend; and what pleasure must arise from the united discoveries of his glories and his love!

To these pleasures of action and contemplation, the godly man can join those of reflection, and hereby enjoys the past as well, as the present. Though the time past is irrecoverably lost, considered as a part of duration; yet in a moral view it is not lost to the man, who has filled it up with offices of piety and benevolence.

The past days and years of the slothful and irreligious, as one observes, are worse than lost; for they have no fruit from them, and yet must account for them to their final Judge. Vice, which allured them with her deceitful charms, as she approached in a temptation, has quite another appearance, when viewed behind, and frights them with her ghastly train. The guilty pleasures, to which they sacrificed their most valuable interests and hopes, turn to gall and wormwood in the remembrance.

If there were any such art, as that of forgetfulness, the sinner many times would gladly learn it; but be-

cause he cannot so easily blot things out of his memory; he therefore endeavours to stifle his conscience, which he dreads as a mortal foe to his peace. But the pious man has no reason to regard conscience, as his enemy; for it encourages him to continue in well doing, by giving him a heartfelt reward for his past works of faith and love. Conscience anticipates the sentence of the last day, "Well done, good and faithful servant." In short, as reflection is one of the distinguishing faculties of man, so it may be rendered a source both of very great profit and pleasure. It *is* so to the diligent and fruitful Christian. "His yesterdays look backward with a smile." He has a pleasure in reflection, with which none of the pleasures of sin can compare; a pleasure, which he can repeat, when he will; and the more valuable, in that while it springs from time past, it runs on into the future; for,

I must add, religion gives its votaries the pleasures of *hope;* a hope, whose object and foundation are most excellent and stable, for it has for its basis the immutable promises of God; and its object is no less, than eternal life in the full fruition of his infinite beauty and love.

Hope is the great enlivener of the world; the grand spring both of human activity and felicity. What then must be its efficacy, when it terminates on an infinite, everlasting good; when it prelibates the substantial, elevated glories of immortality! What a tenfold value and sweetness does this hope impart to the Christian's present temporal and spiritual enjoyments! What vigour and fortitude must it inspire under the prospect or pressure of evils!

Finally, as religion heightens the pleasures and soothes the distresses of life, so it disarms the terrors, and softens the agonies of death. There is something dread-

ful in death, in the view both of nature and of conscience. But true religion, founded on Christian principles, inspires such sentiments and habits, such reflections and prospects, as give peace and fortitude to the mind in the view and actual encounter of this last enemy. It begets such a firm confidence in the mercy of God, such a sweet assurance of his love, such a meek submission to his will, such a holy contempt of this world, and such a relish and hope of the heavenly felicity, as enable good men to meet death with steady composure, and sometimes with elevated, triumphant joy.

## IMPROVEMENT.

How groundless and pernicious is the idea of those, who view religion as an unpleasant, or melancholy thing! What enemies to mankind as well, as to themselves, are those, who fight against the Christian system; a system, which gives to religion its brightest, fairest form, and which equally befriends our present and our future felicity! Its very restrictions and duties as well, as its encouragements and benefits, are all benevolently adapted to our immediate advantage and comfort. Those, therefore, who labour to subvert the Christian faith, or to weaken its influence, are cruelly endeavouring to rob us of our best friend, the only prop and solace of our existence!

Let us inquire whether we are possessed of religious wisdom, whether we have tasted the sweets of this divine food. If we have, religion is to us a source of real pleasure: even now we prize it above all other dainties; we hunger and thirst after more; we are travelling in wisdom's ways with growing activity and delight; and we are using our influence in our social spheres to bring others to share with us in the divine entertainment.

Sinners are left without any reasonable objection

against religion. Few, I hope in a land of light, will question, whether the state of the godly in a future world is better than that of the wicked. Yet many doubtless are prejudiced against it, on account of the present difficulties which attend it. But such prejudices are entirely groundless. For the wise man, and by him the all-wise God, intimate, that the pleasure of religion, even now, is like eating honey and the honeycomb. If then you refuse the ways of religion, under the idea of their being unpleasant and toilsome, you give infinite wisdom and truth the lie. If you say or think, that the paths of holiness are full of gloomy melancholy, which will sink and deaden your spirits, you impeach the divine veracity, and you contradict and offend the generation of God's children. Will you object, that religion will be attended with shame? What! are you ashamed to eat the honey and the honeycomb, the repast of angels, the bread of heaven, because you may be ridiculed by some stupid or distempered creatures, who have no relish for such dainties? Will you despise wisdom, which makes the face to shine, merely because fools hate knowledge? Or can you object, since wisdom is so excellent, against seeking it soon?

How very great will be the final reward and happiness of the godly! If the pleasures of religion are so sweet, even in this state of imperfection and trial, what will they be in the state of perfection and retribution! In heaven the bliss of good men will be infinite, most excellent in kind, and boundless in duration. How little reason have the righteous, then, to envy the prosperity of the wicked; or to repine under affliction, or to indulge an uneasy, disconsolate, or unthankful temper!

Let me close with an affectionate address.

Let me recommend this wisdom from above to you, my fathers, who are grey with years, and bending to the

tomb. Your relish for the delights of sense, for the active scenes and gay amusements of life is greatly impaired and almost at an end. Oh, fly to the nobler pleasures and hopes of religion, as the only substitute for these perishing joys. Make a seasonable retreat from the cares and gratifications of the world; let your last days be chiefly devoted to religious improvement, to a growing preparation for heaven; and be careful to leave your aged, dying advice to your children and the rising age, in favour of the sweetness and excellence of religion: "My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to thy soul: When thou hast found it, then shall there be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off."

Let me next remind you, my brethren, who are in the meridian of life, that as yours is the very age of manly wisdom, it becomes you to shew your superior judgment by obeying the counsel of Solomon in the text. Remember, among all your busy cares and pursuits, that "the merchandise of wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold." If you acquire it, it will draw down the divine benediction on your worldly pursuits, and give a tenfold value to your other gains and enjoyments. But if you neglect it, your greatest worldly acquisitions will leave you destitute of true satisfaction in this life, and give a keen edge to your poverty and misery in the next.

As to you, children and youth, since every pulse, every sense calls loud for pleasure, let me entreat you to seek it in early religion. Now, my young friends, is the seed time of life; if you now sow to the spirit, you shall reap a proportional harvest, either in a life of solid, serene satisfaction here, or at least, in rivers of immortal pleasures hereafter. Religion, far from diminishing, will improve

all the charms and innocent delights of your sprightly age.

Finally, Let those who are destitute of this wisdom, earnestly seek it. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hidden treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." And let those, who have it, feel and exhibit the pleasures of it, manifest a noble contempt of sensual and vicious delights, a cheerful resignation, when stripped of earthly comforts; and look, and long, and ripen for that world, where their graces and joys shall be mature and perfect.

# Sermon XI.

## The Want of a practical Regard to religious Truth, the Cause of dangerous speculative Errors.

2 THESSALONIANS ii. 10, 11, and 12.

*Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

THE apostle, in this chapter, predicts a grand apostasy in the Christian church; which, from small beginnings, should grow up to a monstrous height, so as to form an unparalleled system of religious tyranny, fraud, and corruption.

The description given of this apostate antichristian power, of its rise, its rule, its subjects, and its fall, so exactly and exclusively agree to the papal usurpation or the bishop of Rome, that little reasonable doubt can remain, that *this* power is "the man of sin," the "son of perdition," whom the spirit of prophesy here characterizes and devotes to destruction. The text describes the persons, who voluntarily submit to this corrupt power, and shall perish with it. They are such, as never cordially love the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness; and hence were easily seduced from those sound doctrines, which they always secretly disliked, into such false principles as suited their depraved inclinations and practice. Hence God, by a righteous judicial act, gives them up to delusion and wickedness, and thus seals their endless destruction.

Though the words before us primarily refer to the willing subjects of antichrist, they will fairly admit of a much larger application, and may be reduced to the following general proposition; viz. that the want of a sincere practical regard to religious truth has both a natural and moral tendency to lead men into the most dangerous speculative errors.

The great sin, for which the persons in the text are so severely condemned, is designated by their not receiving the love of the truth. This designation applies, in a greater or less degree, to all, who profess or enjoy the Christian religion, but whose hearts are not reconciled to its pure, self denying doctrines and laws. Their understandings, perhaps, are constrained by evidence to admit these doctrines, as true; but their wills and affections rise up against them, as severe, as inimical to their favourite pursuits and gratifications. Their haughty and sensual, their sordid or revengeful spirits disrelish and spurn a system of religion and morals, so holy and humble, so generous and forgiving, so meek and peaceable, as that of the gospel; a system, which not only forbids and seeks to exterminate their dearest lusts, but threatens all the votaries of these idols with everlasting punishment. As the thief or midnight assassin abhors the light of day, not because light is in itself odious to him, but because he views it as menacing him with public detection and ignominious punishment; so the sinner hates the light of gospel truth, because it exposes, and affixes disgrace and ruin to persons of his dark, iniquitous character. His enmity to religious truth is therefore rather consequential, than direct; that is, he opposes it not as truth, but as a mortal foe to his comfort and security in a sinful course. There is such a natural correspondence between the human understanding and truth, that the mind of man

cannot reject truth, or embrace falsehood *as such*. When therefore the text represents wicked men, as not receiving the truth, and as believing a lie; the meaning is, that the opposition of their wills and practice to the pure maxims of divine truth induces such disorder and blindness upon their understandings, that they come to view religious objects in an inverted shape; they view moral and evangelical truth under the odious garb, which belongs to falsehood, and a lie under the alluring aspect, which is proper to truth. Thus the infidelity of their hearts and lives at length gains over their judgment to its side, and produces a harmony between their inclinations and principles; which brings us to point out more distinctly how the want of a practical love to the truth naturally leads to a speculative rejection of it.

In the first place, it draws away the understanding from a close attention to it, and thus hinders it from perceiving its evidence, certainty, and importance. Deep, reiterated, and earnest inquiry after religious truth is necessary to a clear and unwavering reception of it. But those, who cherish corrupt affections, which are averse to the purity of divine truth, will, by natural consequence, turn away their thoughts from an object so unpleasing, to some more agreeable topic. They will not suffer their minds to dwell upon the evidence or reality of these things, which they heartily wish were neither evident nor real. And when they have thus expelled these unwelcome ideas, the contrary and more pleasing notions find an easy admittance into their naked, unguarded understandings.

Secondly. A heart opposed to strict religion fills the mind with prejudice and partiality in all its inquiries and reasonings upon it. A man of this description has really prejudged the cause; has previously determined

to find the Christian doctrine to be either false or pernicious, or at best a needless and contemptible system. The influence of corrupt prejudice to pervert and darken the mental eye is beautifully illustrated by our Saviour, when he says, "If thine eye be *single*, thy whole body shall be full of light," that is, nothing extraneous must cleave to the eye in the act of seeing; it must be single, that is, pure, simple, unmixed, be left entirely to itself and its object; then thy whole body will be full of light. But if the eye be obstructed either by some covering, mote, disease, or injurious accident, the light is either shut out or obscured, and the object beheld in a very partial and erroneous manner. All this is easily applied to intellectual vision. Every act of sin, especially the habitual love and practice of it, is a mote or disease in the eye of the mind. For instance, sensual affections and indulgences send up, if I may so speak, such gross, defiling vapours from the lower regions of the soul into the upper, as effectually obstruct a clear, impartial view of spiritual truth. Agreeably, an inspired prophet tells us, that whoredom and wine take away the heart; that is, they weaken and gradually destroy the intellectual and moral powers.

Covetous affections and pursuits have likewise a very blinding influence on the understanding; insomuch that the most avaricious miser cannot see, cannot admit the conviction that he is covetous; the sordid vice, which absorbs and devours him, and which strikes every spectator with contempt and abhorrence, appears to himself a necessary, useful, and perhaps virtuous habit; and every measure, which coincides with his mercenary views, however fraudulent or oppressive, is beheld by him in a favourable light. In a word, there is perhaps no vicious passion, which confounds and infatuates the reasoning and judging faculty even of the greatest,

and in other respects the best minds, so completely as this. Accordingly, we read that a gift or a bribe blindeth the eyes of the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous; yea, that a gift destroyeth the heart.

Pride and ambition have likewise a deceptive influence upon the human understanding. As covetousness stupifies the mind by sinking it too low, so ambition dazzles it by raising it above itself.

I might enumerate many other corrupt affections and habits; but the three just mentioned seem to be the most comprehensive and powerful, as corresponding to those three grand objects of the depraved heart, pleasure, profit, and honour, which form a mighty threefold cord, by which the tempter draws the world along after him; draws it in a manner so rapid and fascinating, as in some degree subverts the very understandings of his votaries; so as to make them believe a lie, believe that they may, yea, ought to worship these idols as their gods, embrace and pursue them as their chief good, and sacrifice every thing to the enjoyment of them. No wonder then that the devotees of these idols disrelish, and gradually bring themselves to reject the pure, self-denying, and humbling truths of the gospel, which forbid and condemn their favourite pursuits and enjoyments, and substitute some flattering scheme of falsehood in their place.

As a vicious heart and life are thus a natural and fruitful source of speculative error; so they have a moral tendency to the same pernicious effect; in other words, they often provoke God to give men up to fatal delusions. This is expressly asserted in the text, respecting a particular description of sinners. But here a formidable objection lies in our way. It is asked, how God, who is light and truth in the abstract, can send darkness or delusion into the minds of his crea-

tures; how an effect, so impure and malignant, can proceed from a cause, which is perfectly holy and good? For the solution of this difficulty, I might introduce the general opinion of metaphysical writers respecting the nature of moral evil, as radically consisting in the privation of good. On this principle we may easily explain in what sense God may be said to send delusion into the minds of men, consistently with his moral perfections.

He may do it, in the first place, by withdrawing from their understandings and hearts his enlightening and regulating influence. Both Scripture and reason prove, that the human soul, especially in its present weak and corrupted state, is constantly dependent on the concurring assistance of the first cause for the due exercise, and even the continued existence of its various powers. This being granted, how natural, how congruous to reason is it to suppose, that God, as a just punishment of the sinner's criminal neglect or perversion of his own intellectual and moral powers, withdraws from these faculties his gracious assistance; withholds that light from his understanding, and those restraints from his passions and will, which he has ungratefully resisted and forfeited, but without which he will immediately plunge still deeper into the darkness of error and guilt. It is easy to see that such a divine withdrawment is perfectly righteous and holy on God's part; for it is only leaving the sinner to his own chosen blindness and folly. It is equally easy to see that the departure of God from this offending creature will be certainly followed with increasing delusion as well, as wickedness on the part of the sinner! for his understanding is hereby left open and prepared for the greatest errors; while the evil affections and prejudices of his heart are left to operate upon his perception and judgment with united, unrestrained force.

Further, GOD may be said to send men delusions, when he providentially orders out to them such circum-

stances, or presents to them such objects, as he knows will eventually, though not efficiently or necessarily, lead them into dangerous error. The Bible is remarkable for directly ascribing to God every thing, which takes place in the course of his providence, even such events as imply or result from the greatest freedom and wickedness on the part of the immediate actors or subjects. Accordingly, when men, who have long practically opposed the truth, are providentially cast among such books, companions, or teachers, as are exactly fitted to seduce persons of their loose inclinations and morals from strict religious principles into flattering and destructive errors, and when their seduction is in fact the consequence of such a combination of circumstances; both scripture and true philosophy authorise us to say, that GOD has sent strong delusion, and that herein he has acted with untainted purity and exemplary justice, subjecting offenders to a punishment suited to their previous character, without violating their liberty or participating in their criminality. In a manner similar to this, are we to understand the account given in Scripture, of God's putting a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets. The meaning of that figurative representation is, that when Ahab, by his idolatry and wickedness, had made himself fully ripe for destruction, GOD permitted, and in this way employed the lying spirit, which actuated the prophets of Baal to deceive him to his ruin. In like manner when Pharaoh had resolutely hardened his own heart, against the express, repeated command of Jehovah, enforced by evident miracles; GOD righteously permitted him to be confirmed in his delusion by the lying wonders of the magician as well, as left him to grow more obstinate in sin by means of those very dispensations, which ought to have been improved to an opposite purpose. Agreeably, one method

in which God has sent delusion upon the subjects of antichrist, has been by permitting that apostate power to deceive its votaries by a false pretence and a specious imitation of miracles; which have been no better than the impudent boast and juggling tricks of impostors, or at most the operations of Satan, judicially permitted by Heaven, to strengthen the delusion of those, who had previously and wickedly subjected their understandings and conduct to that system of falsehood and abomination. Accordingly, in the verse preceding the text, the man of sin is described as appearing *with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceiveableness of unrighteousness.* By providentially ordering, or permitting these wicked artifices to be successfully practised upon those, who were predisposed to yield to their influence, GOD righteously gave them up to fatal delusion.

This judicial procedure of divine providence is here mentioned as a very dreadful dispensation. It will appear to be so, if we consider that it not only immediately affects the *soul*, the vital part of man, the centre of his happiness or misery, but it strikes at this nobler part in its most distinguishing perfection, by subjecting its guiding faculty to delusion and blindness. Hereby the main office of the understanding and conscience is destroyed. The intellectual and judging faculty becomes a blind leader of the blind. The very light that is in us becomes darkness! How great then must that darkness be! A person in this situation is constantly exposed to stumble, yea, to fall into the foulest ditch, into the most defiling and destructive enormities, and in the end, to fall into the pit of endless perdition. This is the final issue of error, sinfully cherished and retained. God shall send them delusion, that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth. The native and ultimate tendency of every religious error is dangerous to the health

and life of the soul, and will actually produce fatal effects, if suffered to exert and diffuse itself unchecked. Some errors are immediately destructive. Great mistakes in speculation, indeed, may be so counteracted in their influence by strong habits and dispositions of goodness, as not to destroy the virtue and final happiness of their subjects; while smaller errors, embraced by light or vicious minds, are in many instances eventually fatal, as they insensibly lead on to greater, and thus betray their soul into an inextricable labyrinth of delusion, irregularity and mischief; the natural termination of which is irretrievable, everlasting ruin. In reviewing our subject, we are led to this important inference, that the only sure method to establish our faith in the truths of religion, is to cherish a cordial love and obedience to them. We have seen that the want of this practical regard to the truth is the main source of speculative unbelief and delusion. Would we then continue stedfast in the infinitely momentous truths of Christianity, in this giddy, sceptical, and licentious age? Let our affections and practice embrace and steadily adhere to these divine principles: let us supremely love and delight in them on account of their transcendent purity, let us cheerfully and steadily regulate our conduct by them. Let us rejoice with our whole hearts, that there is such a salvation, and such terms prescribed for the enjoyment of it, as the Bible reveals. If our affections and practice thus cleave to the truth, our understanding and moral sense will naturally see more and more of its beauty, will be more candid, diligent, and successful in their inquiries after it, and thus be led into more comprehensive views, and a more full, stedfast, and impressive belief of it. GOD has likewise promised and actually affords peculiar light and direction to such as sincerely love and practise religious truth. In a word, the specious arguments of subtle ob-

jectors against natural or revealed religion derive their greatest charm and seductive influence upon mankind, from their own corruptions, from their secret willingness to be deceived. A heart and life, therefore, truly pious and good, would be the shortest and most satisfactory method of answering all these objections; this would give us an experimental, and delightful, and immoveable assurance of the truth and excellence of religion. Further, our subject enables us to account, in an easy and satisfying manner, for the principal errors, both in opinion and practice, which have prevailed in the world. For example, we plainly perceive the main root of modern infidelity and atheism. The leading doctrines of natural and revealed religion are so necessary and suitable, so beneficial and comforting to a creature, so framed, circumstanced, and related as man, that every good and considerate mind must at least wish to find them true, and accordingly must carefully attend and readily yield to the abundant evidence by which they are confirmed. The disbelief of these principles, therefore, especially in enlightened protestant countries, must in general be traced to a depraved heart or profligate life, which leads them first to dread and hate, and at length to renounce those truths, which stand in the way of their favourite propensities. The same account may be given of the errors of Popery, which have so long and so extensively prevailed in the world, and to which our text immediately refers. It seems very strange at first view, that creatures, enlightened at once by reason and revelation, should be capable of believing such an assemblage of absurdities and lies, as the Romish religion contains. But when we consider how exactly that system falls in with the corrupt inclinations of the human heart; how admirably it gratifies the avarice and ambition of their priests, especially in higher orders,

by giving them the command both of the purses and consciences of the people; and how entirely it suits and flatters the licentious appetites and passions of mankind at large, by allowing them every vicious indulgence here, and yet assuring them, on very easy conditions, of final absolution and blessedness, we may readily see the reason why so great a part of the world, especially in the dark ages, were induced to believe and hold fast so pleasing a delusion. At the same time we doubt not that many individuals in popish countries, of the best hearts and morals, have by the force of education and example, and the want of better means of information, been led to believe and to sacredly observe the peculiarities of that apostate church. We might easily account, in a similar manner, for the prevalence of certain dangerous errors in the Protestant world. For instance, how gratifying must it be to those, who are devoted to vicious pleasures and pursuits, and who have long practically defied the threatenings of future punishment, how gratifying to such persons to hear that these threatenings will never be executed, that they have already spent their force upon Jesus Christ, as the head and surety of mankind; in consequence of which the most abandoned sinners are placed on as fair ground, and have the same unconditional promise of everlasting life, with the most exemplary saints. How pleasing to proud and carnal hypocrites is the doctrine, which teaches them to regard certain transient internal feelings, joined with an orthodox belief, as a sure evidence of saving faith, conversion, and fellowship with God; while they are led to view a life of strict virtue and holiness as a comparatively low and needless attainment? How pleasing also to the depraved heart is the opposite idea, that exterior civility, morality, or devotion, without a corresponding sanctified temper of mind, will recommend us to the

final acceptance of Heaven! These and similar schemes of religious falsehood naturally engage the approbation and warm attachment of those, who hate strict practical godliness, because they lend effectual aid to that great effort of our degenerate nature, which aims to reconcile conscience and lust, or the hope of future happiness with the present indulgence of sin. On the whole, it would be easy to show, if time permitted, that all the fashionable errors of the present day are the natural growth as well, as just punishment of its licentious taste and manners. Let us then be humble under a sense of those sottish and dreadful delusions, at which human nature is capable of arriving; let us bless that divine goodness, which has preserved us so far from these evils; let us constantly watch and pray against them, let us beware of that giddy spirit, those itching ears, that extreme liberality and freedom of inquiry, which have ensnared so many; let us prize and search the Scripture, receive its truths into an honest, unbiassed heart, and practise them in a holy, obedient life: this only will keep us stedfast to the end.

# Sermon XII.

## Naaman the Leper.

2 Kings v. 10—14.

*And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servant came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith unto thee, wash and be clean? Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.*

THIS chapter, with a beautiful simplicity peculiar to the sacred writings, relates the story of Naaman the leper. As this man was a favourite of the king of Syria, and possessed high rank and authority under him; his master hearing that there was a prophet in the land of Israel, by whom leprosies were cured, sent Naaman thither to be healed. Accordingly this great General having presented himself in his chariot at the door of Elisha's house, the prophet sent out a messenger to him, direct-

ing him to wash seven times in Jordan, and assuring him in this way of immediate recovery! But this mode of proceeding not suiting the pride and preconceived notions of Naaman, he spurned the message, and rode away from the house in great indignation. But the servants, who attended him, more wise in this instance than their master, respectfully expostulated with him on the impropriety of rejecting so simple and easy a prescription. Naaman, not possessing that foolish haughtiness, which disdains the wholesome advice of an inferior, was persuaded to follow the prophet's directions. The consequence was his perfect recovery.

The proud spirit and reasonings, which at first led this man to reject the message of Elisha, influence many at this day to oppose religion, especially the doctrines and prescriptions of the gospel; while his ultimate obedience to the prophet and its salutary effect fitly represent the wisdom and happiness of those, who, in spite of their conceited, but perverted reason, and preconceived prejudices, submit to the merciful directions of Christianity.

If we trace the spirit and reasonings of modern atheists and infidels, we find them strikingly correspondent with those of Naaman in the text. What leads many proud philosophists to reject the common belief of a God, or of a great first cause, possessing infinite wisdom and goodness? It is this; they first determine in their own minds what plan of conduct ought to be pursued by a Being perfectly wise, just, and benevolent. By this standard of ideal perfection they try the works of nature and providence; and finding many appearances in both falling short of this standard, and directly condemned by it, they conclude that perfect intelligence and goodness have either no existence, or no concern in the formation and government of the world, or that their in-

fluence is defeated by some malignant principle of equal or superior force. Thus all religion is laid prostrate by human vanity, assuming the right of dictating to infinite wisdom. But how preposterous is this! We all condemn the proud folly of the Syrian Captain in determining beforehand the manner, which the prophet of JEHOVAH ought to observe in curing his leprosy, and in refusing the important blessing offered him, because the mode of conveying it did not answer to his previous expectations. And is not that pride still more foolish and presumptuous, which settles beforehand a system of operation for the Deity; which decides by abstract human reasoning how he ought to have made and to govern the universe; and which concludes that there is no God, or no perfect moral governor, and so no sure foundation for piety and virtue, merely because a few detached appearances do not accord with its own blind but boasted theory? Shall the insect, whose sphere of vision is bounded by a circumference of one or two inches, lay out the plan of a magnificent palace, or censure the skill of the architect on account of some apparent speck or roughness in that part of the building, which he is able to survey? Yet the greatest human or even created mind is far less than such an insect, when compared with the infinite Being, or with the immensity of his works and designs. In short, we are wholly incompetent to decide, by mere speculation, what kind of a world, or what scheme of administration was most worthy of boundless intelligence and goodness.

We may indeed reasonably conclude, that the production of the greatest sum of virtue and happiness must have been intended by an all perfect Creator; but what means would be necessary and best fitted to this end, can be known to us only by fact and experience. Now experience and analogy teach us that many things,

which at first view seem most repugnant to the order, beauty, and happiness of the system, are on the whole conducive to each; that the most disagreeable things in nature and providence are the result of good general laws, and in many instances produce the most salutary effects; that so far as our observation reaches, the constitution of the world affords numberless proofs of wise and benevolent design, of a holy and righteous administration, of a prevailing tendency to happiness; and finally that the great mixture of evil in this part of the creation contributes in various respects to the increase of virtue and felicity, and is probably a branch of one comprehensive scheme, which embraces the universe, and eternity, and which will eventually produce the greatest quantity of good. Influenced by these sober sentiments, let us submit our vain imaginations to the test of experience. Like the Syrian leper, let us be persuaded honestly to try whether the waters of Jordan be not better than the fancied streams of Abana and Pharpar. Let us faithfully use the means of safety and happiness, which are actually afforded, before we venture to despise them, or to imagine that other and better resources ought to have been provided.

But this brings us to the main object of this discourse, viz. to apply the text to the subject of *revealed religion*. Many persons profess themselves friends to the religion of nature, while they spurn the gospel of CHRIST; they erect the former on the ruins of the latter, just as Naaman magnified the rivers of his own country at the expense of those in the land of Israel. But their reasonings against revelation are at best uncertain, abstract speculations, which will not stand the trial of fact and experience. When these objectors extol the sufficiency of natural light, we can appeal to the actual state of the whole heathen world, both ancient and modern, for a

confutation of their pretence. Besides, if the law of nature were ever so plain and perfect, what would this avail to imperfect, depraved, and obnoxious offenders? Can a perfect law pardon and justify its guilty violators? Can it cure the moral leprosy they have contracted? Can it ease their wounded consciences, and restore them to the assured favour of their offended Creator? Does it become persons in this situation to despise that divine Prophet, who offers to heal them? Does it become them to reject that heavenly instruction and assistance, forgiveness and consolation, which he only can bestow? Will such objectors say that they are not satisfied with the *credentials* of this divine Messenger? That the miracles alleged in proof of his mission are romantic and incredible tales? But if sinful men needed an extraordinary instructor, it was equally necessary that the mission and doctrine of such a teacher should be confirmed by extraordinary or miraculous proof. His miracles therefore were equally important and credible with his merciful instructions.

Will they say that some of his *doctrines* are absurd, unintelligible, or useless? But perhaps the doctrines in question appear absurd merely because they contradict and condemn the pride, the prejudices, or the corrupt dispositions of the objectors. Those, who love darkness rather than light, who set up their own wisdom or lusts as their supreme rule, will naturally dislike those truths, which cross and mortify themselves. What is there really absurd in the gospel doctrine of redemption? Was it unworthy of infinite benevolence to send a person of superior, of divine dignity, to enlighten an ignorant, to atone for a guilty, to sanctify and console a depraved and miserable world; especially when all other expedients for its recovery had been long tried in vain? Does it become sinners, redeemed at such a price, to find fault with that mysterious love, to which they are so much

indebted, or to refuse its offered blessings, merely because they cannot comprehend all the reasons on which it proceeds, or the precise manner, in which its infinite benefits are conveyed? Are not the reasons and the mode of divine operation in the works of nature and providence equally unsearchable? Do not many of the common proceedings of the Most High equally transcend our conceptions, and confound all our previous calculations? Does not analogy therefore lead us to expect similar and even greater wonders in the extraordinary dispensations of his grace? Besides, though we cannot fully comprehend the divine conduct, or those doctrines, which relate to it; yet we may know enough of these truths to regulate our own practice. By diligent and prayerful contemplation we may obtain that knowledge of God and the Mediator, and of the revealed method of salvation, which may effectually guide and animate us to the correspondent duties of pious gratitude and reverence, faith and confidence, imitation and obedience. If we cannot understand all the reasons of GOD'S appointments, yet the appointments themselves are sufficiently obvious, and are recommended to our observance by the strongest motives. The prescriptions of the gospel are very plain and decided; "wash and be clean;" "believe and be saved;" "repent and be forgiven;" "ask and receive." Was it foolish and base in the Syrian leper to spurn the plain direction of Elisha, because he could not see why or how the waters of Jordan could be more medicinal than any other? And is it not far more absurd and criminal for sinners, on a like pretence, to reject the equally evident precepts of Christianity? Suppose we could see no fitness in the established connexion between repentance and forgiveness, between faith and salvation; yet to argue merely from our ignorance that this establishment is arbitrary, absurd,

or incredible, would be infinite folly and presumption. For though it is very fit and pious to inquire with modest reverence into the ends and reasons of God's dispensations and requirements; yet to set up our ignorance against his manifest authority and wisdom, is the extreme of madness and impiety. Besides, we can see an evident fitness in the very nature of the gospel prescriptions. What can be more reasonable than that a rebel should *repent*, that is, cease to be a rebel, before he is pardoned? And since the repentance of the individual, however sincere, cannot repair the public injury and dishonour occasioned by disobedience; how suitable is it that the humble penitent should *believe*, that is, heartily acquiesce and confide in that Mediator and atonement, which his offended but merciful Sovereign has appointed? How suitable, how necessary is that vital gospel faith, which opens the heart to the influence of those truths, which alone can enlighten and comfort, purify and exalt it? How reasonable is it that the repenting and pardoned believer should henceforth live, not to himself, but to the honour of his forgiving GOD and compassionate Redeemer! It appears then that the peculiar precepts of our religion are in their own nature morally fit and binding as well, as enjoined by infinite authority. They are not only plainly prescribed by GOD, but directly and essentially conducive to the moral recovery and happiness of man.

The same observations will in a great measure apply to the *positive institutions* of Christianity. These are manifestly necessary both to express and promote those internal and moral exercises, which we have just recommended. They are necessary to keep alive in our memories and hearts the great facts and doctrines of our religion, and thus to preserve their genuine practical influence on our temper and conduct. In this view the

appointment of a Christian Sabbath and priesthood, of a visible church and public worship, of gospel baptism and the Lord's supper, is evidently founded in wisdom and goodness. Each of these ordinances is admirably fitted to secure and advance the great interests of piety and virtue. If the observance of outward ceremonies, as memorials or seals of great transactions and events, be recommended by the wisdom and experience of all nations and ages; if it be proper and beneficial to our own country to celebrate the anniversary of her independence; it must surely be more wise and useful for Christians to commemorate their dying and risen Redeemer by observing that day and those ordinances, which are sacred to his memory, and which remind them of their great duties to him and one another. Those persons therefore discover, not a truly philosophic and enlarged, but a vain and ignorant mind, who despise these Christian institutions; who proudly demand, what sense or advantage is there in separating a seventh portion of our time from worldly to sacred uses; in employing so many hours in attending public worship and instruction; in eating bread and drinking wine at the sacramental table; or in pouring water on the face of an unconscious infant? It would be a sufficient answer to these questions to say, that the divine Founder of our religion has seen fit to establish these ceremonies, as tokens of our faith and obedience, and the ordinary channels and seals of his spiritual blessing. And shall we refuse such easy methods of expressing our regard to him, and of drawing down his saving benediction on us? If, as the servants of Naaman reason with their master, if our divine Lord had bidden us do some great thing, ought we not gladly to have done it? If he had enjoined upon us services as burdensome and costly as those of the ancient

Jews; ought we not cheerfully to perform them, as a grateful return for his costly love, and as the mean of enjoying his infinite benefits? How much more then, when he only bids us observe a few simple and expressive rites, which directly tend to our edification and comfort as well, as to his honour?

This train of thought may be equally applied to all the means of religion. In the case before us as well, as in other particulars, there is a beautiful analogy between the world of nature and that of grace. In both God accomplishes his ends by the instrumentality of means. In both his blessing is connected with our prudent and dutiful exertions. As his providence supports our natural lives only in the use of our own activity; so his grace ordinarily quickens and saves our souls only in the way of our serious and prayerful diligence. Though God could have cured the Syrian leper without his washing in Jordan, and though he could, if he saw fit, purify us from sin without the application of means, yet the cure of the former was wisely connected with his obedience to a certain prescription; and our spiritual renovation and final salvation are with equal wisdom connected with an earnest attendance on the means of grace. By this process God proclaims his sovereignty and our duty. While he teaches us to depend on him for all spiritual blessings, he obliges us to seek them in his own way, and in the best use of those faculties and privileges, which he has given us. We grant that the prayers and endeavours of unrenewed sinners, however solemn and zealous, are not truly holy; nor can they of themselves produce a sanctified heart, or justly claim this blessing from God. Yet that merciful Being, who hears the cry of the ravens, and who honoured his own appointment in the case of this leper, by making it effectual to his recovery, may equally bless his

own means to the saving good of those, who seriously attend them. Let none then be induced to neglect or despise these means under a false idea of exalting or trusting in mere sovereign grace. We do not really honour, but tempt and insult the Almighty, when we expect his blessing in any other way, than he himself has warranted. If the diseased Syrian acted wisely in trying the method of cure proposed by a prophet of Israel, with whom he had no previous acquaintance; how much greater encouragement have we to try the prescriptions of the gospel; we, who know that these directions come from God, that they have proved effectual to all who have sincerely followed them, that the observance of them will afford present as well, as endless felicity, and that inattention or disobedience to them will render our disease incurable, and consign us to everlasting perdition! What words or imagination can describe the wisdom of embracing, and the madness of rejecting these merciful proposals! May Almighty grace deeply impress these ideas on our hearts!

I cannot willingly close without distinctly remarking the happy and glorious effects, which in the instance before us grew out of a few small and unpromising circumstances. A little Hebrew maid in Naaman's family informs him of a prophet in the hostile land of Israel, who could cure his inveterate disease. He travels into this country with a retinue of servants. These servants, by interposing at a critical moment as humble counsellors, were the occasion of his cure. This miraculous cure of his body reclaimed his mind from its former idolatry to the belief and worship of JEHOVAH, the God of Israel. This conversion of a high officer in Syria, and its visible fruits had probably some happy influence on his idolatrous countrymen, particularly on his own family, especially on those faithful attendants, to whom

he had been so highly indebted. Thus a number of little incidents, like a few scattered seeds, may spring up into a copious harvest, and the conversion of one sinner may spread out into the reformation of a multitude. Thus too the disease of the body, or some outward calamity, may and often does, like Naaman's leprosy, prove the first step to the salvation of the soul.

In these and many other particulars, how wonderful, how glorious are the ways of Providence! What important lessons do they teach us! They instruct us not to despise, but to regard with a degree of reverence the meanest persons and the slightest events; since these may be the destined instruments of the greatest, yea of infinite good. They teach us to support with resignation, fortitude, and even thankfulness the most perplexing and afflictive circumstances; since these may eventually prove or occasion the most valuable and permanent benefits.

They instruct persons of superior station or talents to receive with calmness, condescension, and gratitude good counsel or information, even when offered by servants or inferiors; since they may, at least in some instances, possess more reason and virtue than themselves.

Finally, when we behold the Supreme Ruler accomplishing the most important ends by means apparently the most trivial and inadequate, yea, educing future and eternal good from present evil; how fervently should we echo the pious exclamation of the apostle—"O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the LORD, or who hath been his counsellor? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to him be glory forever. Amen."

## Sermon XIII.

# On the Love of the World.

1 John ii. 15.

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

WHAT a dreadful sound do these words convey to the ears of those, whose affections and pursuits are wrapped up in sensible objects! By the world and the things of it we are to understand this earth, or the present scene of human existence, with the various materials for activity and enjoyment, which are furnished by it, and terminate in it. By loving the world and its contents cannot be meant every kind and degree of earthly attachment: for the Author of nature has planted in the human constitution such a variety of affections and appetites, and surrounded us with so many objects, harmoniously adapted to these affections; that some degree of love to these objects is at once natural and unavoidable, becoming and beautiful: without it, we could neither discharge the essential duties, nor enjoy the valuable comforts of the present state. Besides, the world, considered as the production of Deity, and as destined by Him for the accommodation and entertainment of man, justly claims our grateful and admiring affection; which affection, far from excluding or abating, directly cherishes and improves our pious sentiments and acknowledgments to the glorious and beneficent Creator.

When therefore Christianity requires us to renounce the world, the idea is, that the world, considered as perverted by human apostasy, as nourishing and inflaming our corrupt affections, or, in other words, an earthly and sensual life, conducted upon the maxims of worldly and depraved men, is forbidden, as incompatible with that spiritual and heavenly life, to which we are called by the gospel. Agreeably, the verse following the text explains the prohibited objects of attachment by voluptuousness, avarice, and worldly ambition. In short, our love to any earthly good falls within the description of the apostle, when it habitually exceeds its proper limits, or usurps the empire of our hearts.

It therefore becomes a very interesting inquiry, *When* our love to the world may be styled inordinate, or be said to form our ruling affection. After we have satisfied this inquiry, we will endeavour to show, that such a worldly temper is incompatible with the character and hopes of a real Christian.

I. When may our earthly affections be called immoderate, so as to reach the sense of the text? We answer,

First. When the world, or any object in it engrosses our *thoughts* in a degree, which excludes serious reflection or pious meditation; our love to it becomes unsuitable and idolatrous. Certainly the infinite God, who gave us the faculty of thought, is the most worthy object of its exercises. The contemplation of his perfections, works, and revealed will, is the most noble, momentous, and perfective employment of our rational natures. Serious and earnest consideration of spiritual and divine subjects is likewise the first step to true conversion from sin to holiness as well, as a principal mean and evidence of continued, progressive piety in the human heart. When a person therefore has his

thoughts so immersed in worldly business or pleasures, that religious ideas find a very rare and unwelcome admittance; when he industriously shifts off these ideas to some more convenient season; when he contents himself with giving a few spiritless and broken thoughts to God and religion upon one day in seven, or at the seasons of his morning and evening devotion, as a kind of compensation for sacrificing all the rest of his time to some earthly idol; in short, when the world is his constant associate, the last companion of his thoughts, when he begins to sleep, and the first, when he awakes; these are sure symptoms of predominant worldly affections: for as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. If a man then thinks of the world with the greatest frequency, freedom, and delight, he is certainly a worldly character.

Secondly. When the things of the world engross our whole conversation, it is an evidence of the same truth. Man is so formed, that the ruling dispositions of his heart will give their own complexion to his social intercourse. If then we have no taste for any society or conversation, but that which savours of the world; if we scarce ever mention the name of God or the Redeemer, or introduce any religious subject in our daily converse, except it be in a light, or cavilling, in a profane, or at best disputatious manner; we give, at least, probable evidence, that we love the world more than God.

Thirdly. Our attachment to the world is immoderate, if we are unwilling to part with it upon proper occasions, or to give it up to the divine disposal. If we are backward to improve that portion of it with which God entrusts us, in a manner agreeable to his pleasure and honour; if we take more delight in hoarding large and useless treasures, or in sacrificing them to unbounded vanity and luxury, than in supplying and comforting the children of want and distress, or in serving God, the

church, and commonwealth, by acts of generous and pious munificence; if it is a burden to us to support the gospel, and ministers of Christ, or the necessary civil government of our country; in short, if we do not readily seize, and even rejoice in every opportunity of doing good with our substance; we make it manifest that we love a little worldly interest above God, Christ, our neighbour, our country, yea our own everlasting happiness. The same observation will apply to those, who cannot willingly resign their estates, their honours, their friends, their earthly all, when divine Providence calls for such a sacrifice; who cannot comparatively hate and despise even the most excellent and beloved creatures, when set in competition with the will and the friendship of the Creator; but whose murmuring or desponding sentiments, when stripped of their earthly treasures or comforts, evidently speak this language; "Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more?"

Fourthly. Discontentment with our portion of the world proclaims a criminal love to it. If we secretly repine, because we are not blessed with every earthly convenience, elegance, and delight, which some others possess; if we are not entirely willing, that God should govern his own world, and distribute his own favours, as he pleases; it proves that we pay that homage to the world, which belongs only to its infinite Maker and Sovereign. If we loved God above all, we should be content and satisfied with Him, with his will, his fulness, and his love. We should feel rich and happy in such a Friend and Portion, however poor and low in worldly respects. If then the mere want of worldly affluence throws us into an undutiful or peevish frame towards the Most High, or produces envious feelings towards our more prosperous neighbour; we certainly set the world in God's place.

The same remark may be made upon those, who allow themselves in a *distrustful* anxiety respecting their temporal concerns; whose imagination is continually foreboding some distressing or fatal accident to their possessions and enjoyments, to their children, or other agreeable connexions. Such anxiety about any worldly interest or comfort, as unfits us for duty, for society, for a thankful and cheerful use of the blessings of Providence, betrays an unwarrantable affection to the world; for, if we loved it within proper limits, we should resign the comforts of it to the disposal of our heavenly Father. While we exercised a provident and industrious care respecting our temporal concerns, this prudent attention would be qualified by a filial acquiescence and confidence in the governing wisdom and good pleasure of God. We discover a criminal attachment to worldly good, when we pursue it with greater zeal, and enjoy it with higher relish and transport, than we do the service and favour of God, or the sublime pleasures and hopes of religion. We always manifest the greatest eagerness for, and delight in those objects, which stand highest in our affection. The zeal and pleasure, with which we serve our friends, or seek and enjoy their society, are proportioned to the place, which they hold in our hearts. If then we feel greater ardour and delight in religious services and entertainments, than in any other, it is a proof that the objects of religion are supreme in our affections. But if we have little or no relish for devotional exercises; if the private and public worship of God be to us a barren, insipid, and burdensome ceremony; if, while our bodies are engaged in it, our thoughts and desires are roving to the ends of the earth; we prove ourselves utter strangers to the love of God. If we can readily, and excessively mourn any temporal loss or

calamity, but feel no emotions of grief under the consciousness of spiritual evils, under the privation of the sensible presence and fellowship of our Maker; we exhibit clear proof, that we value the world far more than the favour of God.

Sixthly. If we pride ourselves in earthly distinctions, we manifest the supremacy of worldly affection. If we expect great deference, and resent the least contradiction from others, merely because we are raised above them in earthly riches and honour; it is plain we overrate these trifling, adventitious things, in a very puerile and sinful manner. Our fondness for these splendid baubles clothes them, in our esteem, with a thousand imaginary excellencies. It gives them a kind of magical charm, by which their possessor, though destitute, it may be, of every recommending accomplishment both of head and heart, is at once transformed into a sensible, noble, meritorious character, and on this ground challenges implicit submission, and admiration from those, to whom fortune has been less propitious, though possessing perhaps a thousand times more personal dignity.

Seventhly. Our love to the world is inordinate, when we seek to acquire or retain it in a wrong manner, or by unwarrantable means. For example, if we leap over the bound of strict truth or justice in our wordly dealings; if we artfully evade, or openly violate the impartial rule of equity, prescribed by our Saviour; if we take advantage of the ignorance, the credulity, the confidence, or necessity of others; if we go into schemes of speculation or enterprise, which have for their motive an unbounded desire of wealth, or whose manifest object or tendency is to procure a sudden accession of wealth to ourselves, to the immediate or ultimate injury either of the public at large, or of many worthy families

and individuals; if we engage either in some unlawful occupation, or in such a multiplicity of worldly business, as shuts out the duties of piety and charity; if we deliberately plunge ourselves into debts, which we have no reasonable prospect of discharging, or enter into engagements, the fulfilment of which exceeds our ability; if we refuse compliance with the demands of equity, till we are forced to fulfil them; or designedly put it out of our power to satisfy such claims; or continue to improve what is due to another, without his knowledge or consent; if we are determined to pursue and enjoy the world to the utmost limits of what is lawful, or to venture in this road as far, as we possibly can without exposing ourselves to certain damnation; in short, if it be our rule of conduct to employ every measure short of actual theft and robbery, to obtain and keep worldly property; in all or either of these cases we manifest that excessive love to present good, which is condemned in the text.

II. The way is now prepared to show that such a love to the world is inconsistent with the love of God, or with the Christian character and hope. What I now mean to prove is, that, when such inordinate worldly affection habitually possesses and rules the heart, the love of God is certainly wanting.

For, First, the nature of things and the constitution of the human soul forbid the supposition of its loving two different, much more two contrary objects, supremely, at the same time. As man has but one heart, one self, so he can give this but to one master, or chief good at once; for it is a plain contradiction to say, that one heart can have two chief goods at the same time; for, if one be chief, the other must be subordinate. If the heart lays itself out supremely, or fully, upon one, it

must proportionably exclude the other, as having no room to receive it, no vigour to bestow upon it. If we could suppose the heart equally divided between two objects; in this case, it could not properly be said to love and serve either, as its master; for the two objects or affections, like two equal and opposite forces, would destroy each other, in such a sense at least, as to leave the soul free from the dominion of either. Our Saviour has decided this case in short, when he says, "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other; ye cannot serve God and mammon." The servant must either hate one master in proportion as he loves the other; or if we suppose him to love both, yet the more attentive and obedient he is to the one, the more negligent and regardless he must necessarily be of the other; which demonstrates the utter impossibility of serving God and the world at the same time. This will be further illustrated, if we observe,

Secondly, That the commands and interests of these two masters in many instances clash with each other; so that in obeying one, a man must necessarily disobey and renounce the other.

It is the first and great command of God, that we love him with all our hearts, and souls, and strength, and have no other god, or portion, but himself. But mammon requires and persuades its votaries to love the world with all their hearts, and to cleave to it, as their god and portion. God enjoins us to adhere closely to his institutions in our religious worship; but the world entices its admirers, either to neglect the worship of Jehovah, or to corrupt it with human inventions, in order to suit it to worldly inclinations and views. God

requires of us a reverential and sacred use of his name, attributes, sabbath, word, and works; but the love of the world often leads men to an impious prostitution of them for secular purposes. God commands us to be content with such things, as we have; but the love of the world speaks a language directly the reverse. The command of God forbids fraud and unrighteousness, theft and falsehood; it forbids us to covet the property, or to envy the prosperity of our neighbour; but the world inspires its votaries with dispositions, and urges them to actions, diametrically opposite to these precepts. God expressly requires us to set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth; to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; comparatively to hate our dearest worldly connexions and interests; to lay up our treasure in heaven, and in heart to sell all that we have, that we may purchase the pearl of great price; to be anxiously thoughtful or careful for nothing here below, but to exercise a cheerful, thankful, supplicating dependence on our heavenly Father, both for our present subsistence and our final happiness; and in a word, to consecrate our all to the great purposes of honouring God, doing good to men, and promoting our own everlasting salvation. But inordinate worldly affection opposes and defeats both the spirit and the letter of the divine requisitions. What the apostle predicates of the love of money equally applies to the attachment before us, which indeed is nearly coincident with it; it is the root of all evil; it is an unfailing source, a comprehensive summary of human transgression and misery in all their varied forms. It leads to, or rather implies the heinous sin of idolatry; for every covetous or worldly man is pronounced by the word of God an idolater. What is idolatry but paying divine honours to a crea-

ture? And what higher acts of honour can we render to the Deity, than supreme love and confidence? These every covetous, and, I may add, every sensual and ambitious man pays to the world. What though he does not formally bow down his body before it? He does unspeakably more; he makes all the faculties and affections of his soul bow down to this idol. What though he does not literally offer sacrifice or burn incense to mammon? What though he does not present to it so much as one bleeding lamb? He offers that, which is far more valuable: he sacrifices the poor, by suffering them to perish with want; he offers his own body, by exposing it to every hardship and peril for the sake of gain; yea he offers his soul to this his deity, as a whole burnt offering, by devoting it to everlasting flames for the sake of the world. Who, my brethren, are the most stupid and detestable idolaters? Those who offer slain beasts to the sun and to fire? Or those who sacrifice their own bodies and souls to dirt and clay?

It would be endless to enumerate the black catalogue of crimes, which issue from this love of the world; the extortion and oppression, the hatred and strife, the falsehood and unrighteousness, the perjury and profanation of public justice, the robberies and murders, the wars and bloodshed. There is no evil, whether private, domestic, or public; no impiety against God, nor injury against men, which is not wrapped up in this prolific passion, and which has not been actually generated by it. The heart, therefore, which is the subject of a reigning principle so extensively evil, cannot be the true servant of a Being infinitely good. Which leads us to add,

Thirdly, Since God, on account of his transcendent excellence and worth, is entitled to our supreme affec-

tion; it follows that no regard to him can be proper and acceptable, which does not far exceed our love to any other object. If therefore a person possessed some degree of respect to God, but at the same time regarded the world with still higher esteem and affection; the former would be justly accounted, as nothing, as vanity, and a lie. For nothing merits the name of love and homage to the Supreme, but that which treats him as supremely glorious, and accordingly gives him the supremacy, yea, the entire possession of the heart. Since therefore the reigning love of the world denies him this supreme affection; it is justly stigmatized as inconsistent with proper and genuine love to him. This reasoning will acquire additional strength, if we observe,

Fourthly, That the same realizing and efficacious views of the glory of God, which attract the least degree of true love to him, will certainly produce a supreme affection. All unrenewed or impenitent sinners are inimical to the great Jehovah, from a conviction of his holiness, justice, and truth, and of their own contrariety to this holiness, and consequent exposedness to the condemning sentence of this justice and truth. This enmity can be removed only by the removal of its cause: which is accomplished when we become radically changed and renewed from sinful idolatry, by the Spirit of the divine Redeemer. When this is effected, we are reconciled to God; being now conformed in disposition to his moral character. Of course those awful attributes of Deity, which before we viewed with dislike and terror, are now amiable and consoling to our minds. His holiness, which is the sum and crown of his perfections, is now congenial and delightful to our sanctified taste, and raises our highest esteem and complacency. I say our highest esteem; for the same objective grounds, which

engage us to love him at all, will constrain our superlative affection: for we love every object according to its apparent loveliness and value. Now, since God necessarily appears to the enlightened and renewed mind, the best and most excellent Being; since he is an object perfectly suited to its rectified dispositions, and fitted to satisfy its largest desires and expectations; it will of course give him its highest love. It will seek and find its proper happiness in him alone. It will despise and renounce all created sources of enjoyment, when brought into comparison or competition with him. Where there is not this transcendent love to the chief good taking place of inordinate worldly attachments; there is not that spiritual renovation in the views and affections of the mind, which is essential to the Christian character.

Our subject may be applied for the conviction and terror of those, whose character answers to the description of the text. It is to be feared there are many nominal Christians, who really belong to this class, who yet esteem themselves true disciples of Christ, and heirs of his heavenly kingdom. They cloak their covetous desires and pursuits under the soft and innocent names of prudence and economy, of commendable diligence, or necessary attention to the support of their families. Similar arts of self deception are used by those, who are supremely devoted to the honours or pleasures of the world. But let me beseech all such characters critically to examine their own habitual feelings and conduct, by those marks of a worldly temper, which have been specified; and if on such inquiry, conscience shall pronounce them guilty, let them solemnly consider, that the word of God excludes them from the catalogue of Christians, and expressly shuts them out of the kingdom of heaven. Let them remember too, that

the nature of things as well, as the revealed constitution of God, debars those, whose hearts, whose chosen treasures have been wholly earthly and sensual from the spiritual and refined felicity of the celestial world. It is congruous, it is necessary, that our fate should correspond to our prevailing choice and character during this preparatory state. If then the world be the main object of our affection and delight, our happiness, such as it is, must necessarily expire, and a state of consequent misery ensue from the instant, in which death shall separate us from this idol of our hearts. Then, if not before, we shall fully realize the truth and emphasis of the poet's monitory representation;

"Lean not on earth; 'twill pierce thee to the heart;
A broken reed at best; but oft a spear;
On its sharp point peace bleeds, and hope expires."

Let us all remember, that the world in its best state cannot suit and fill an immortal spirit; that its purest enjoyments are at once mixed and unsatisfying, precarious and transitory. Reason, experience, and revelation unitedly proclaim that all below is vanity. Thus saith the Lord, Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain. Riches take to themselves wings, and fly away. Worldly honour and sensual gratification afford but a short-lived gleam of pleasure. Earthly friendships are imperfect and mortal. The world itself is passing away. From henceforth then let us seek a better country, that is, an heavenly. Ye that seek it, seek it early. Set your affections on things above, not on things of the earth. For, by your Christian baptism and profession, ye are dead to the world, and alive to God and heaven. Act agreeably to this profession. Let your life be hid with Christ in God. Then, when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, ye also shall appear with him in glory.

# Sermon XIV.

## On the Divine Preference of Mercy to Sacrifice.

MATTHEW xii. 7.

*I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.*

THIS passage is quoted by our Saviour from the Old Testament, to justify his disciples in gathering and rubbing out a few handfuls of corn, for their necessary refreshment on the Sabbath day. When the superstitious Pharisees condemned this action, as a profanation of the Sabbath, Jesus repels the accusation by showing, from their own scriptures, that God requires acts of charity before positive or ceremonial observances.

When God declares by his prophet, "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice," the genius of the Hebrew language, and the general tenor of Scripture, oblige us to understand it in a *comparative* sense; as importing that the Deity values sacrifice *far less* than mercy, and when they interfere with each other, he requires us to omit the former, and attend to the latter. Many important texts, both in the old and new Testament, must be evidently expounded in this comparative sense.

The words, thus explained, suggest the following proposition; That moral duties towards men are a more valuable and essential branch of religion, than external acts of worship towards God.

To set the proposition before us in a correct and just light, I must observe that religion essentially consists

in the respect of dependent creatures to their Creator; which respect, expressed in every suitable way, comprises the whole of religious duty. Hence acts of justice and charity towards men may and do form a part of religion, because a true regard to God will prompt sincere love and beneficence to his creatures; and when these social affections and offices flow from a pious respect to God; when only a cup of cold water is given to one of Christ's disciples, as a testimony of love and obedience to him; it is as properly an exercise of true religion, as those duties, which immediately refer to our Maker.

Accordingly, the duties of religion are justly divided into two great classes; one of which refers immediately to God, the other to man. It must be further observed, that the worship of God consists of two parts, external and internal: the former is made up of bodily and visible action; the latter of the secret dispositions and exercises of the heart. The one is an outward sign or manifestation of the other, and is also an essential ingredient in social or public worship; as without it our common sentiments and feelings could not be expressed. But internal homage, consisting in hearty love, reverence, gratitude, penitence, and desire, constitutes the main part, yea the soul of true religion and of acceptable worship. To illustrate still further this important distinction, let us attend to the ancient Jewish sacrifices, to which our text alludes, and which formed a large part of God's ancient instituted worship.

The killing and offering of beasts upon the altar was the external part, or the body of that worship; while love to God, repentance of sin, and faith in the future sacrifice of Christ, were the inward and vital spirit of it. The latter was an indispensable duty at all seasons and in all

situations, because it was of moral and immutable obligation. But the former varied, according to the circumstances, opportunities, and abilities of the subject. Agreeably, the apostle tells us, that, where there is a willing mind, a man is accepted according to that which he hath, and not according to that which he hath not. While therefore God always requires the homage of our hearts, he may alter, and even sometimes dispense with visible forms of devotion, where circumstances or some greater duties forbid their observance.

Accordingly, we are now prepared to prove, that acts of justice, mercy, and usefulness to our fellow men are greater duties, than external religious worship; though they are confessedly inferior to that inward devotion towards our Maker, which is the first and parent duty. This superiority of moral duties is confirmed, not only by the express declaration of our text, but by numerous arguments both from Scripture and reason.

*In the first place*, the Bible insists on these moral virtues much more, than it does on external worship. Even the law of Moses, though very strict and copious in its ritual prescriptions, yet dwells with peculiar frequency and emphasis upon social duties.

In the twenty-third chapter of Exodus, that inspired lawgiver enumerates a long catalogue of moral virtues, and denounces a dreadful sentence upon those, who neglected them. "Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of the poor. Thou shalt not falsely accuse nor slay the innocent. Thou shalt take no gift in judgment. Thou shalt not oppress the stranger. Six years shalt thou sow thy land, but the seventh thou shalt let it rest, that the poor of thy people may eat." In Deuteronomy, he dwells still more largely and earnestly on the same topics. "Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor

shut thy hand from thy poor brother, but thou shalt open thy hand wide unto him. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live." In the twenty-seventh chapter of that book, he directs the Levites to stand on Mount Ebal, and solemnly declare the curse of God upon transgressors; and it is remarkable that of eleven different sorts of offenders thus denounced, ten are doomed for violating moral and relative duties, and one only for neglecting or corrupting the ceremonies of religion. It is also remarkable, that six of those ten commands, which form the basis, and exhibit the leading spirit of the Jewish system, and indeed of all true religion, are devoted to the several branches of social virtue. Agreeably, the great body of the Old Testament prophets insist frequently and principally upon justice, mercy, and truth; and they promise the favour and best blessings of God on those, who steadily practise them. The Jewish Scriptures very often characterize the godly man, by the epithets *just*, *merciful*, *upright*.

The same features are conspicuous in the New Testament writings. When various descriptions of men resorted to John, to receive his instruction and baptism, he chiefly inculcated moral reformation and social duty. Our Saviour too, in his sermon on the mount, dwells principally on a right temper and conduct towards our fellow men, and pronounces blessings on persons of this character. The writings of the apostles are likewise full of moral precepts. Even those epistles, whose prime object is the illustration, proof, or defence of evangelical doctrines, yet hold up Christian morality as the great end and fruit of these doctrines, and by these they pathetically urge believers to mutual love and kindness, justice and truth, forgiveness and long-

suffering, and the whole train of relative virtues. Since therefore these duties are far more insisted on throughout the Bible, than external worship, we strongly infer their superior importance.

Secondly. When these two branches of duty are mentioned or compared together in Scripture, the former is evidently preferred to the latter.

Thus, when the prophet Isaiah charges the Jewish people with awful degeneracy and wickedness, he predicates this charge, not upon their neglect of external worship (for they abounded in sacrifices and oblations, in solemn meetings and festivals); but upon their violation of justice and mercy, without which he assures them that their multiplied religious observances were iniquity and abomination. He therefore calls upon them to reform from their unrighteousness and cruelty, to seek judgment and relieve the oppressed, to judge the fatherless and plead for the widow; and on this condition promises them the divine acceptance and blessing. In another part of his prophecy, after describing the people of Israel as taking delight in approaching to God, in fasting, praying, and attending ordinances, and as complaining that their zealous services were not accepted, he proceeds to inform them, that the more acceptable fast is to "break every yoke of oppression, to deal their bread to the hungry, and to cover the naked." In this way he assures them of the divine benediction. The prophet Micah also, after speaking with comparative contempt of burnt offerings, or of presenting to God thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil, adds; "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

The same decided preference of morality to external devotion marks many other passages of the Old Testament. Our Saviour frequently pronounces the same decision; and, in express terms, styles judgment, mercy, and fidelity the weightier matters of the law.

Thirdly. The history of the Bible shows, that very degenerate and hypocritical professors of religion more commonly abound in acts of worship, than in moral duties. This, we have just seen, was remarkably true of ancient Israel. It was equally true of the Scribes and Pharisees, those worst of hypocrites, in the time of our Saviour. They were very precise in performing their religious ceremonies, while they covetously and cruelly devoured widows' houses. These facts prove, that a zealous and persevering attachment to devout forms is far more consistent with a false and degenerate heart, than the steady practice of social virtue; and consequently that the latter is more excellent, and a more decisive symptom of a good character, than the former.

Fourthly. When the gospel directs us to show our faith by our works, it principally intends works of justice and charity. Thus the apostle James, when pointing out the best fruits and evidences of saving faith, says; "If ye fulfil the royal law, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well." He goes on; "What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, and hath not works; can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food; and one of you say to them, go your way, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not the things which are needful for the body; what doth it profit?" This implies that such profession of faith is as unprofitable and as hollow, as good words to the naked and hungry without giving them any assistance. He accordingly adds,

"Even so faith," if it have not works, that is, such as are enjoined in the royal law just mentioned, "is dead;" that is, it is wholly lifeless and unprofitable; yea, as the apostle proceeds to affirm, it is no better, than the faith of devils; for it is a faith without love and its beneficent fruits, and of course has nothing of the spirit of true religion or morality. Accordingly, the apostle John represents it as a natural impossibility for a man to love God, and yet neglect acts of kindness to his neighbour. "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him; how dwelleth the love of God in him?" And through his whole epistle, he insists on brotherly love and its fruits, as the surest mark of love to God. Saint James likewise, when summarily describing real Christianity, says, "Pure religion and undefiled is this, to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction." All which abundantly confirms the proposition before us.

Fifthly. The Scriptures represent our final sentence, as turning eminently upon our moral works. Christ, who is to be our Judge, tells us, that many in the day of judgment will plead their great religious professions and performances; they will urge, that they have prophesied in his name, that they have eaten and drunk in his presence, or at his table; but their plea will be rejected. On the contrary, works of love and mercy towards men, especially towards afflicted Christians, are stated to be the principal things, which the Judge will honourably mention and reward in the righteous, and the neglect of which he will punish in the wicked. He will accept the former, as if done to himself; because they flowed from, and exhibit the best evidence of a spirit of faith, love, and obedience to him; and he will condemn the latter, as affording the most decisive proof of a want of

true affection to himself. Our Saviour, in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, describes this final process and decision in the most particular, simple, and affecting manner. We must suppose, that in this description, the most important and distinguishing marks both of Christ's friends and enemies are held up to our view. Yet we find no mention made of external worship, nor of any thing, but the performance or omission of moral duties. How strong then is the inference that these, next to inward piety, are the most excellent part of religion!

Having supported our doctrine by a variety of scriptural proof, let us listen a few moments to the voice of reason on this subject; which will not only further establish the point in hand, but show us the rational grounds of its truth.

Now, in the view of reason, moral duties are superior to outward religious ceremonies, because the former are right and excellent *in their own nature*, and constitute a great part of the end of religion; while the latter are useful chiefly, as signs or instruments of something further. Moral truth, justice, and charity, are unchangably fit and beautiful in themselves; they are immediately necessary and conducive to the general good as well, as to the true perfection of the agent. When rightly performed, they imply that holiness, and directly promote that happiness, which are the ultimate object of all religious institutions. But the external worship of God is valuable chiefly, as a sign of inward piety, or a mean of moral goodness. Substantial or practical virtue is, therefore, as much superior to religious rites, as the end is superior to the means, or real excellence to the mere sign or expression of it.

Again, by outward devotion we express our regard to God by *words*, or professions only; but by good works to our neighbour we show our respect to God by *deeds*. When a man publicly professes the religion, and attends the ordinances of Christ, he only calls him Lord, Lord; but if he imitates and obeys him by a meek, kind, and useful conduct, he actually does the things, which he saith. If a man worship God by prayer and praise, he expresses with his lips a devout and suppliant, a penitent and thankful spirit; but a conscientious discharge of all moral duties expresses the same spirit in language far more credible and emphatical; I mean, the language of the life: he loves God and men, not in word and tongue only, but in deed and in truth.

We may add, that the steady practice of moral virtues is far more crossing to a selfish, proud, and depraved heart, than the performance of religious rites. The latter in many cases may be observed without much expense or self denial. Instead of counteracting, they may be rendered subservient to worldly interest, reputation, and power. Thus the ceremonial strictness and long prayers of the Pharisees were at once the cloak and the engine of their insatiable avarice, ambition and vanity. They served to varnish their characters, to promote their vices, to quiet their guilty consciences, and to nourish their religious hopes. But a life of strict justice and fidelity to their neighbours, of condescending and liberal charity to the poor and afflicted, would have contradicted their selfish and haughty dispositions; it would have been a costly and fatal sacrifice of their covetous and criminal pursuits.

These observations apply still more strongly to the ceremonial and moral precepts of Christianity. The religious institutions of the gospel are so few and simple,

that persons may visibly attend them, without greatly taxing or suspending their worldly ease, emolument, or pleasure. At the same time, these institutions have so serious and sacred an aspect, that a regular and zealous attendance upon them may be made a convenient cover, compensation, or instrument, of the most immoral dispositions and purposes. But the practice of Christian morality implies the sacrifice of personal ease and honour, interest and pleasure, to the good of our neighbour and the public. It implies that expensive, resolute, and persevering self denial, which is one of the best proofs of a virtuous heart.

Hence the performance of moral duties reflects greater honour upon God and religion, than external devotion. For it exhibits a more decisive testimony, a more self denying proof, of inward respect and obedience to God. It is honouring him, not by cheap professions only, but by costly sacrifices. It implies an affectionate and stedfast imitation of his moral character. It immediately reflects and recommends his moral beauty and glory. By practically loving our neighbour as ourselves, by showing an invincible regard to the rules of justice and charity, we prove in the best manner our devotion to the command, example, and honour of our Maker and Redeemer; we give the most convincing testimony, that God is worthy to be regarded and obeyed in the greatest and most self denying instances, and that inordinate self-interest, in all its claims and appearances, is to be readily sacrificed on his altar.

In short, works of benevolence, while they glorify God in the most substantial manner, directly contribute to the good of his creatures, and thus accomplish the two great ends of religion, namely, the happiness of the universe, and the honour of its Creator.

We readily grant, that if our goodness extended to God, as it does to man; if our external worship could benefit the former, as our charitable offices do the latter; in this case our obligation to acts of devotion would as far exceed that of social duties, as God is greater than man. But the transcendent greatness of the Deity, while it entitles him to the first place in our hearts, exalts him infinitely above the necessity or possibility of receiving benefit from our services. He has, therefore, appointed his sensitive and rational creatures, especially such of them as are peculiarly dependent or indigent, to be his deputies or representatives, to receive from us those beneficent offices, which we cannot immediately perform to himself. Hence it comes to pass, that next to the love of our Creator, our most important duty is to seek each other's welfare, and in this way to give the most acceptable proof both of our piety and benevolence.

Our subject, in review, furnishes a strong argument for the truth and divinity of the Bible. The Scriptures harmonize with sober reason in making love to God the first duty of religion, and in assigning the second rank to right affection and conduct towards men. In this point Christianity essentially differs from, and infinitely excels, all other systems. The pagan, mahometan, and popish religions lay the main stress on ceremonial observances; while modern infidel philosophy, being compelled, by the light and influence of revelation, to abandon the absurd and foul superstitions of ancient systems, has erected a partial and external morality on the ruins of piety; it has expunged both the inward and outward worship of Deity from the catalogue of human duties. Christianity alone steers a safe and middle course between these fatal extremes. It comprises the whole of virtue in the love of God and our neighbour. It makes substantial

beneficence to the latter the best fruit and evidence of our regard to the former. When we compare the gospel in this particular with the best efforts of human reason, we are constrained to regard it, as the offspring of divine wisdom and benevolence.

Hence secondly, our doctrine suggests an easy answer to one of the most plausible and common objections against revealed religion. It is often objected by free-thinkers, that the Bible is a superstitious, fanatical, and contemptible book, because it enjoins so many religious ceremonies, which in themselves are unmeaning and useless. But such persons should consider that this same book holds up substantial piety and morality, as the end and crown of all these ritual observances. They should also consider, that in the present state of human nature, the love and practice of moral goodness can neither be duly expressed, secured, nor promoted, without some outward forms of religious worship and instruction. But reason and fact assure us, that the numerous ceremonies enjoined on the ancient Jews were of essential importance to preserve that gross and intractable nation in the faith and service of the true God, and the consequent practice of strict, uncorrupted virtue. It is equally manifest, that the regular observance of the Christian Sabbath and its public ordinances is highly important to the interests of practical religion and morality. We may add, the objection before us impeaches the wisdom of all nations and ages, in appointing visible symbols and rites, as seals and memorials of important civil transactions and events. If America has acted a wise and useful part in commemorating the birth of her independence, or the nativity and death of her most distinguished patriot; it must surely be equally proper and beneficial for Christians to celebrate their dy-

ing and risen Redeemer, and to attend those stated public memorials and instructions, which remind them of the great moral duties they owe to him and one another. Those, who ridicule Christianity on this ground, instead of showing a correct and liberal mind, or any real friendship to moral virtue, prove themselves strangers to both.

Hence thirdly, our subject condemns all those, who make a separation between devotion and morality, or who exalt one on the ruins of the other. There are many nominal Christians, who seem to place the whole of religion in orthodox faith, pious feeling, or devout external forms; while they overlook, or perhaps despise the moral duties of the gospel, and can hardly endure those preachers, by whom they are frequently enforced. The religion of this class of men, instead of making them good members of domestic, civil, and Christian society, often renders them selfish and unfeeling, proud and censorious, contentious and unmerciful. But such persons should consider that true piety is an unfailing spring of moral goodness; that the main proof and glory of it consist in the steady love and practice of those virtues, which assimilate human nature to the divine; or which render men like God in justice and truth, in active, universal benevolence. They should consider, that the most strict and zealous attendance on religious ordinances is useful and acceptable only, as it expresses and promotes the love of God and our neighbour; and that the best evidence of this love, both to ourselves and to the world, is a temper and life devoted to the general good. In short, as faith without works, so prayers without alms, and good feelings without virtuous actions, are essentially defective, in the sight of omniscient purity. Let such persons further consider, what solemn importance and dignity the Bible has conferred on moral du-

ties, by ranking them higher than the immediate worship of God himself. That infinite Being, who justly merits and strictly requires our private and public homage; who in ancient times condemned to instant death the man, who profaned his Sabbath; has yet expressly directed that his own sacred worship shall give place to needful offices of kindness to his rational, yea even to his inferior creatures! How then can any flatter themselves that they are serving and pleasing God, while they are habitually unkind to their fellow-men, or even to the brutal creation, however religious they may seem to be!

But there is an opposite description of men, who insist that morality is the whole of religion; that works of justice and charity are the only duties, which possess any worth or utility; and that the performance of these will certainly entitle them to the favour of God and the happiness of heaven. But this opinion is condemned by the whole current of Scripture as well, as by the clearest dictates of reason. That God ought to be worshipped, is a natural and uniform sentiment of the human mind. Both the law and gospel echo this sentiment. Our blessed Saviour, who was our perfect exemplar, constantly united devotion with charity. He strictly observed the ceremonies of the Mosaic law. Will any pretend that their knowledge and virtue place them above the need of those ordinances, which are sanctioned both by the example and authority of Christ himself? Will they arrogantly say, that their moral attainments are greater, or their sentiments more correct, than his? If He thought an attendance on religious institutions necessary to show a due regard to the divine authority, to complete his own moral character, and to influence others to such attendance by the weight of his example; does it not equally become imperfect men, of whatever

description, to conduct on the same principles? Can a person be a truly moral man, who does not obey *every* divine command? who does not reverence and worship his Maker, a Being of infinite moral excellence? Can that man be steadily just and faithful to his fellow creatures from a sense of duty, who is unjust and disobedient to his Creator and Redeemer? Can *he* be qualified to serve and enjoy God forever in his temple above, who takes no pleasure in worshipping him here below?

May divine grace impress these solemn hints on each of our hearts! May we all be instructed to unite mercy and sacrifice, the social and divine virtues in our characters here, that we may be fitted for the perfect exercises and pleasures of worship and charity in the kingdom of heaven.

# Sermon XV.

## On Christian Hope.

1 John iii. 3.

*Every man, that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

THE apostle in this chapter endeavours to comfort and inflame his fellow Christians, by setting before them the transcendent greatness of God's love, and the excellency of those privileges, which accrue to them from it. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" This wonderful privilege of being the children of God, is granted to, and enjoyed by the saints, even in the present life: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." But still greater privileges are reserved for their future enjoyment; "for we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." What a sublime and comforting prospect! A prospect which, though its object be future and distant, conveys a good degree of present animation and fruition, through the anticipating influence of Christian hope. Even the remote view or expectation of such a felicity gives more delight and satisfaction, than the present enjoyment of the highest sublunary good.

At the same time, this hope of heavenly glory, far from lulling its possessor into indolent security, or encouraging him to carnal and forbidden indulgence, is the most powerful and constraining incentive to duty.

"He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure." While his supreme desire and expectation centre in the future beatific vision and likeness of his Lord, he feels himself incited to resemble him as much as possible, and thus to make the nearest approaches to, and the best preparation for his expected felicity.

When the Christian is said to *purify himself*, the idea is, that he acts in this affair as a dependent, subordinate agent; that he is a worker with and under God; that having received an habitual principle of holiness from the Spirit of grace, he, by the concurring aid of the same Spirit, diligently exerts this principle, or improves this talent, in a steady course of virtuous and useful conduct.

When the believer is further described as purifying himself, *even as Christ is pure;* the phrase *even as* denotes a resemblance in kind, not an equality in degree. It imports that the expectant of future glory possesses, and studiously cultivates, the same love and meekness, the same pure and heavenly dispositions, the same spirit of submission, cnoformity, and obedience to God, which were perfectly exemplified in Jesus his master; though he never does nor can reach that ardour and strength of virtue, which appeared in this divine Exemplar. Thus, in the natural body, the same vital fluid, in kind, which dwells and flows in the head, pervades all the inferior members; though in the former it may be accompanied with more refined and vigorous spirits. Though we should grant that the Christian hope prompts an earnest pursuit of the same *degree* of purity, which the Saviour possesses; yet this would not infer the complete success of such pursuit; for the best imitation of the feeble copyist can never equal the absolute perfection of the original.

The great object of the ensuing discourse will be, to illustrate and confirm the purifying efficacy of the Christian hope. In order to which, it may be useful, in the first place, to state more particularly, what is included in the work of self purification, here ascribed to the hoping believer.

Now as all purification imports the removal of defilement; so this expression, in the moral or evangelical sense, signifies deliverance from the pollution of sin. With regard to the defiling power of sin in the heart, this must be gradually destroyed by repeated exercises of penitential sorrow for it; by a vigilant prevention of the overt acts, and, as far as possible, of the inward motions of it in future; by frequent and strict inquiry into the state of our minds with respect to sin and holiness; by planting our strongest guard against constitutional or favourite vices; by keeping our bodily senses and appetites under a constant and severe regulation; by cherishing habitual regards to Christ and the peculiar discoveries of his gospel; and finally, by calling down succours from above by earnest and continual prayer.

As the prayer of a sincere and contrite heart is the appointed medium of obtaining sanctifying influences from Heaven, so it has an efficacy in its very nature to purify and exalt the soul. For it awakens and increases in our minds a sense of the majesty and goodness, the purity and presence of God; and thus strengthens our impression of the evil of sin, and of the beauty and obligation of holiness. It multiplies and enhances our engagements and motives to avoid iniquity, to resist temptation, and to practise duty. Thus it extinguishes vicious inclinations, increases the tenderness and force of conscience, improves our relish for devout and spiritual exercises and entertainments, our zeal and vigour

in the cause of virtue, and our endeavours to obtain a temper and behaviour corresponding to our prayers.

Having thus viewed the Christian purifying himself as God is pure, let us now attend to the happy efficacy of his hope in promoting this moral purity. That the hope of the gospel believer must have this salutary influence appears,

First, From the *nature of its object*. The great object of the Christian's hope is eternal happiness in the perfect vision, likeness, and consequent fruition of his God and Redeemer. He expects, when his Lord shall appear, *to be like him* both in holiness and blessedness; *because he shall then see him, as he is*.

Now the hope of such a pure and elevated happiness directly implies, and promotes a temper of heart, corresponding with the object in view. It *implies* such a temper, because the very nature of hope involves love to some absent good, joined to the cordial, pleasing desire and expectation of ere long possessing it. It therefore supposes a disposition of mind conformed or attempered to this good: otherwise the mind could not expect it with pleasing emotions, but would regard it with indifference or aversion; that is, instead of hoping, it would rather dread its arrival. Consequently, the hope of completely resembling God hereafter implies a sincere love and conformity to him at present, producing an ardent, expecting, joyful desire of shortly awaking in his perfect likeness. The hope of *seeing Christ, as he is*, at his second coming, implies some affectionate, assimilating, and delightful views of his glory and love, in the present state, inspiring fervent aspirations after the future beatific vision.

This hope likewise directly *promotes* moral purity as well, as implies it. For while the expecting Christian

beholds and anticipates the approaching glory of Christ and heaven, he will insensibly catch the image of that glory; his heart will receive a more full impression of its admired object; and thus will become more pure and heavenly, in proportion to the vigour and frequent exercise of its Christian hope. His desire and expectation of such a holy felicity will likewise engage his assiduous culture of those moral qualities, which must prepare him for it; which alone can dispose, invigorate, and exalt his mind for the sublime employment and bliss of heaven.

A previous and confirmed habit of moral purity must qualify us to enjoy, and even to support the future presence and glory of God; to relish and delight in the moral beauty and harmony of his perfections, and to behold the smiles of his approving face. The subject of an earthly sovereign, who desires and expects to be advanced into his master's palace, to converse and live in the royal presence, will studiously adorn and fit himself for such an elevation. David, in the twenty-fourth psalm, proposes and answers this momentous question; "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart."

Were it possible for us to enter heaven without holiness, instead of being a seat of happiness, it would be to us a state of disgust, mortification, and torment; because nothing in it would suit our vicious and carnal propensities. None but the pure in heart can derive any blessedness from seeing God. To those of an opposite character, the sight and presence of infinite purity must be a source of painful aversion, confusion, and horror. A genuine hope, therefore, of so refined a felicity must stir up its possessor to purify himself, as

Christ is pure; that in this way he may be qualified for the expected joys of his immediate presence.

Again. Christian holiness here is the *appointed condition or mean* of future blessedness. It is indispensably required by the positive constitution of God as well, as by the very nature of the thing. Now the reasonable hope of a desired end is ever grounded upon, and leads to, a vigorous use of the means, which are necessary, or conducive to the attainment of it. None but a madman will hope to reap without sowing, or will sow one kind of seed, and expect a harvest of another. If we sow tares, we cannot, without the greatest absurdity, expect to reap the finest of the wheat. In like manner, if we sow the seeds of vanity and sin in this life, which is the *spring* of our existence, we must expect a corresponding harvest of confirmed depravity, disappointment, and ruin in the next. There is no reaping life everlasting, without previously sowing to the Spirit, or living a spiritual and holy life; and therefore a scriptural hope of everlasting happiness is ever connected with such a life, and powerfully quickens its subjects to persevere and improve in it. Which suggests another idea, viz. that as Christian purity is the great and only evidence of our title to heaven, the hope of it must not only depend upon our having this evidence, but must engage us to preserve it in a clear, satisfying, and advancing state. As we should esteem that man a presumptuous fool, who hoped to inherit an estate, to which he could show no title; so it is equally foolish to hope for the heavenly inheritance, unless we can support our claim to it by the grand charter of the gospel. But we cannot prove this, either in the court of conscience or of heaven, but by the purity of our hearts and lives. No one can rationally satisfy himself, that he is an heir of God and joint heir

with Jesus Christ to future glory, unless he can prove himself a child of God; for *if children, then heirs*. But he cannot prove himself a child, unless he exhibit in his temper and conduct the image and spirit of his heavenly Father, or the peculiar dispositions which become his children; that is, unless he manifest a spirit of filial love and reverence, submission and imitation. A good hope, then, must be founded on satisfactory evidence of real holiness, and must awaken earnest and unceasing endeavours after still higher measures of it.

Again, this hope constrains the soul to purify itself from motives of pious gratitude. For surely if I expect so great and free a gift as eternal life from a Being, who might justly have doomed me to eternal death; every principle of ingenuity, equity, and honour, must engage me thankfully to devote my short life to his service! Shall I, can I go on to affront and defy him, by whose grace I hope to be saved? Can I expect the accomplishment of all his exceeding great and precious promises to such a vile worm as myself, and yet continue to trample upon the righteous laws and infinite benefits of so great and merciful a Sovereign? Can I insult that goodness, from which I expect everlasting blessedness? Can I hope to live and reign in glory with my exalted Redeemer, who was crucified on earth, that I might be glorified with him in heaven? Can I hope for this, and yet crucify this Redeemer afresh, by indulging those sins, which nailed him to the cross? Does he demand no other return from me for his expensive love, than the constant study and practice of holiness, which is as much my privilege, as my duty; and can I refuse him so small a requital; a service so easy, so proper, and so happy for myself? Surely they, who can act so base a part, have not the generous spirit and hope of

Christians, but are lost to common ingenuity. Every true friend of Christ and heir of his salvation is constrained by his redeeming love, and by that affectionate hope and consequent gratitude, which are enkindled by it, to live, not to himself, but to him who died for him, and rose again.

I might add, that beside the moral or argumentative influence of Christian hope, in the respects now mentioned, upon the character of its subject, it has likewise a natural efficacy to sanctify the heart and life. For it is one of the graces of that Holy Spirit, and of that heavenly religion, whose whole design and tendency are to purify and exalt our degenerate nature. Consequently, the *hope* of the gospel as well, as all its other virtues, is essentially holy, both in its nature and effect, and therefore must gradually root out the remains of sin, and carry forward the opposite interest in its happy possessor. Christian hope is also immediately connected with evangelical faith, both as it directly springs from it, and bears a striking resemblance to it; and of course the same pure and noble fruits, which Scripture and experience ascribe to the latter, may with equal reason be predicated of the former.

Our subject leads us to reflect on the excellency of the Christian religion, not only in bringing life and immortality to light, but in giving such a rational and sublime view of future happiness, and rendering the hope of it such an eminent instrument and support as well, as fruit and solace of virtue. Thus the very privileges and comforts as well, as requirements, of the gospel, directly tend to sanctify our hearts, and raise them to their true perfection and felicity. How worthy is such a system of a holy and benevolent Deity! How friendly to the present and final welfare of man!

Our subject presents a certain criterion, by which to try our hopes of heaven. We all, I suppose, profess to be candidates and expectants of future glory. But what are the grounds, properties, and effects of our hope? Is it built upon, and productive of, inward and practical holiness? Or is it accompanied with security, sloth, and sinful gratification? If the latter, our hope and our pretended religion, are mere absurdity, mockery, and delusion. For is it not repugnant to sober reason to hope for salvation, when our very hope is of such a nature and influence, as to prove us heirs of destruction? Can that hope originate from, and lead you to heaven, which has nothing heavenly in its nature and operation, but every thing the reverse? How inexpressibly foolish is it, to expect a holy happiness without a holy disposition! To expect to be finally glorious in the eyes of the Lord, when our prevailing character is unlike and contrary to his! To look for complete and endless satisfaction in the presence, service, and enjoyment of a Being, whom we habitually dislike, and whose laws of fellowship are our greatest burden and aversion! To expect to find our eternal happiness and delight in those spiritual exercises and entertainments, which are entirely opposite to our present determined pursuits and established increasing propensities!

Is it not equally absurd and impious to hope for divine forgiveness and acceptance, without a heart-purifying faith in, and vital union to, Christ? To expect to be spared by that patience, which we continue to provoke, and to be finally embraced by that mercy, which we resolve to abuse? To propose to live the life of the wicked, and yet die the death of the righteous? To live in a worldly, proud, unchristian manner, and then die like holy, humble, heavenly Christians? To hope for victory

over sin and temptation by lazy wishes, without earnest struggles against it? And to enter in at the strait gate, without striving and agonizing for it! How absurd to profess a belief of the Bible, and yet hope for happiness without, yea, contrary to scriptural grounds! to expect the end without the appointed means! Yea, in the use of methods, which contradict and defeat it! Such hopes as these, not only imply the mad expectation of absolute impossibilities, but also the impious presumption, that God will prove false to himself, to his own essential attributes and declared constitution, for the sake of honouring, and saving us in our perverse and rebellious dispositions!

Let those, who have hitherto cherished such infatuated, wicked, and ruinous hopes, be entreated immediately to abandon them; or else they, and their delusive expectations will soon perish together in the pit of destruction; for what is the hope of the hypocrite, when God shall take away his soul! But if we possess the purifying hope above described, let us rejoice in it, bless God for it, walk worthy of it, hold it fast unto the end, and under its enlivening influence press forward to still higher degrees of Christian purity, confidence, and joy. Dearly beloved, having such precious promises as the ground and object of our elevated hopes, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

# Sermon XVI.

## The Christian Pattern.

PHIL. ii. 5.

*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*

THE Christian religion has this unspeakable advantage above all other systems, that it holds out a perfect model of virtue in the life of its Founder; a model, which fully exemplifies and enforces his excellent doctrines and precepts; which exhibits at once the express image and glory of God, and a safe and complete directory for the conduct of man; and agreeably, one main object of Christ's appearing in our nature, and living in our world, was to mark out by his life as well, as by his instructions, the path to immortality.

The apostle in the text and following verses pathetically urges upon Christians a studious imitation of this glorious pattern, particularly in the amiable virtues of love and meekness, of humility and condescension. Accordingly, I shall take occasion to illustrate and enforce the great duty of copying the spirit and life of our blessed Master.

The first inquiry, which this passage suggests, is, in what respects is Christ an example to his followers? The answer is, He is our pattern in those things only, which are common to him and us. He is not an object of imitation in those things, which were peculiar to him, as the Son of God and Redeemer of the world; nor did he exemplify those duties, which result from

our peculiar situation, as sinful and redeemed creatures; such as repentance of sin, and faith in the divine mercy through a Mediator. But Christ is our exemplar in all those right dispositions and actions, which belong to human nature in its uncorrupted state, and to which it is gradually recovered by gospel faith and repentance. We are therefore bound to imitate him in all those moral excellencies, which he exhibited, as a subject of that law, of those relations and circumstances, which were common to him and us. In these particulars he is a pattern admirably fitted to guide and encourage our imitation. For

First, He possessed the same nature, and was placed in the same condition with ourselves; and his example, therefore, being human, exhibits to us the same kind of virtues, practised in the same manner, and under similar circumstances of difficulty and temptation, as belong to ourselves; and thus naturally affects our minds with a far more insinuating and engaging force, than different instances of virtue or even the same, in a different nature. In this view the example of perfect angels or even of the Deity could not be so suitable, so complete, or so encouraging to us: it could not enforce those duties, which are proper to embodied and imperfect, to guilty and redeemed creatures. But Christ was in all things made like unto us, sin only excepted; he was subject to the same infirmities and passions, to the same troubles and temptations as well, as to the same general ties of duty. His example also takes in a *very great compass* of virtue. It is so wonderfully ordered, as either directly to exemplify, or strikingly to enforce the duties of almost every station and relation of human life. Filial piety towards both his earthly parents and his heavenly Father shone in his early and private life. He condescended to teach

us contentment and industry in our various secular callings, however mean and laborious, by following the mechanical employment of his reputed father. By submitting to a poor, dependent, and suffering mode of life, and ever feeling and behaving suitably to it, he has rendered his example exceedingly precious and useful to the bulk of mankind, whom Providence places in a lowly or trying condition. On the other hand, his voluntary debasement of himself from his original dignity and riches to a poor and servile state, affords the most affecting lessons of humility, condescension, and self denial to the wealthy and honourable. By his gentle, discreet, yet authoritative government of his own family of disciples, by carrying the same wisdom and authority into all his public ministrations, and thus holding both the people and their rulers in awe, he gave instructive hints of the true spirit and model of government in domestic, civil, and sacred departments. Though he could not literally exemplify the conjugal and parental duties, because he never sustained these relations; yet he is really our example here to the greatest advantage, on account of that spiritual relation of husband and father to the church, which he fills with corresponding affections and acts. In a word, his conversation was so free, so open, and affable; it preserved such a happy medium between affected singularity and unlimited compliance, between rigorous austerity and unbecoming levity, as rendered it at once very endearing, and admirably fitted for general imitation.

The *notoriety* of his example likewise greatly increases its utility. Not only were the leading traits of his character conspicuously displayed in the country where he lived; not only were his principal actions and discourses performed before great numbers of witnesses; but

his excellent life is exhibited to all future ages in authentic and inspired narratives, whose artless, open, unaffected manner admirably resembles the beautiful simplicity of character, which distinguished the subject of their history.

Finally, The absolute *perfection* of Christ's example forms its crowning excellence. His whole temper and conduct from his birth to his death were pure from the least moral defect: they in no instance fell short of the utmost demand of the moral law, or the perfect moral rectitude and dignity of human nature. Far from this, the excellency of his obedience was greatly enhanced by his trials and sufferings, beyond that which the primitive state of man could admit. While his unblameable life, his entire exemption from guile, both in heart, conversation and behaviour, his total separation from sin and sinners, instruct us to abstain even from the appearance of evil; his careful fulfilment of all righteousness teaches and animates us to do well, to perform every duty to God, our neighbour, and ourselves, in the most exact, engaged, and exemplary manner. In short, his example being equally perfect with the divine law, becomes a safe, easy, and complete rule of duty to his followers; a rule, which warrants and demands their implicit and constant regard.

The usefulness of such a perfect example appears from its tendency to impress mankind with the reasonableness of the divine law in all its requirements, and to guard them against light or indulgent thoughts of any deviations from it. Had no example appeared in our world of obedience fully equal to the law of our nature, men would too readily have concluded that the law was originally set too high for such a creature as man; they would have satisfied themselves with aiming at less than

perfection; they would too easily have indulged many sins, as the harmless and unavoidable infirmities of humanity. But the example of Jesus in our nature, yielding a complete obedience to this law, wipes away this aspersion both from the nature of man and the law of God, by practically evincing that the former was originally capacitated and destined for perfect virtue, and that the latter lies exactly level with this unperverted capacity; and of course that every transgression of this rule is without excuse.

This benefit of Christ's example is enhanced by the divinity of his person. "Though he were a Son, yet he learned obedience." Though he was originally in the form of God, yet by condescending to assume our nature he voluntarily subjected himself to its duties, and placed his greatest glory and happiness in performing the most exact obedience to the will of God. While his human nature was the direct and principal subject of this obedience, it derived a transcendent value and dignity from the intimate union of the man Jesus with the divinity. At the same time his stooping from his original dignity to a state of subjection to his Father's law, recommends obedience to it in the most forcible manner. In this way, as one expresses it, "God has glorified a state of obedience to himself."

We may add, the alacrity and serenity which our Lord expressed through the whole course of his life, amid so many laborious and selfdenying services, greatly recommend his example to our imitation, by showing that the most strict, and even suffering virtue is consistent with self enjoyment; yea, is a rich source of inward happiness. The consciousness of obeying and pleasing his Father, the assurance and enjoyment of his constant presence and support, the glorious recompense and joy set before him sweetened all the toils and difficulties of virtue,

and made the service of God his daily meat and drink. What an alluring charm does such an example give to a life of self-denying and holy obedience!

Having stated in what respects Christ is a pattern to us, and pointed out the eminent fitness and utility of his example, we will now more particularly enforce the duty and importance of our imitating this perfect exemplar.

1. Our obligation to this results from one important part of Christ's errand into our world. While the first and chief object of his mission was to mediate between God and man, by making atonement to the one for the sins of the other; it was a collateral and essential branch of his undertaking to provide for the sanctification of men at the same time, and through the same means, by which he procured their forgiveness. The same spotless obedience, by which he merited and secured the justification of penitent believers, is the great pattern, the effectual incentive and security of their personal holiness. That this was a leading object of his life, appears from the great care taken to record his actions with so much particularity by the pens of four different historians. This design is also frequently and directly expressed by the sacred writers. Thus St. Paul represents the *conformity of Christians to the image of God's Son*, as comprising all those blessings of grace and glory, to which infinite mercy has predestinated them. As God has formed the human nature of his Son to be a fit model of excellence and perfection to his saints; so he forms all the vessels of mercy, all the heirs of glory in a good degree after this model; that by thus partaking of Christ's holiness they may be prepared for a final participation of his blessedness. Does not this infer a strong obligation on all professed Christians to co-operate with God and his Son in this noble design; and of course to

keep the perfect character of Jesus constantly in their eye, and to study the nearest possible resemblance to it? How vain will it be for any to expect the benefits of his death, who have no conformity to his life; since both united form one indivisible plan of salvation, and since our very name or calling, as Christians, is resolved into this conformity to Christ, as our head? Agreeably, St. Peter in the verse of our text says, "Hereunto are ye called, that ye should follow his steps:" and our Lord himself tells his disciples in the thirteenth of John, "I have given you an example, that ye should do, as I have done to you." Which brings us to observe,

Secondly, That imitation of Christ is often explicitly enjoined and pressed upon his professed disciples. How frequently does he propose following him, as the great condition and mark of discipleship! How often does he recommend particular parts as well, as the whole of virtue, as fully exemplified in himself! "Take my yoke upon you," that yoke which I have first borne myself, previously to my imposing it on you; "and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." He also repeatedly commands them to love one another, even as he loved them. Several general and particular exhortations to the same purpose occur in the epistles.* Thus the same divine authority, which enjoins universal holiness upon us, prescribes the imitation of Jesus as itself a constant duty, as a stated and necessary part of our religion, and a great instrument of our moral perfection. The primary gospel duty, which enlivens and rectifies all others, is a designed and studious conformity to Jesus Christ in all those things, which constitute

* See Rom. xv. 5. Phil. ii. 5. 1 Pet. iv. 1.

the moral image of God and perfection of man. While all other examples are proposed to our imitation in a restrictive and occasional manner only; his is set before us as our ultimate and infallible model, which at once limits and controls all other patterns and rules, and challenges our supreme and constant attention. Agreeably, St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be followers of him so far only, as he was of Christ; and after he has pointed out to the Hebrews a great cloud of other witnesses, directs them to centre their views on Christ; "looking," that is, principally and continually "looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."

Thirdly. The relations between Christ and all true Christians bind this duty upon them. He is their Lord and Master, who has both completely taught and exemplified their duty, and in this respect excelled all other masters and teachers. Does not this oblige us to excel all other disciples, in imitating our master? Are the pupils of other doctors zealous to follow their peculiar directions and manners, however whimsical or even culpable? And shall not we be much more engaged to follow the perfect doctrine and example of our divine Instructer? Is he also our best friend and benefactor? Does he call and treat us as his brethren, his children, the members of his body? And shall not we, by a grateful and studious resemblance of him, adorn and fill these endearing and honourable relations? Ought there not to be a beautiful likeness, symmetry, and correspondence between the head and members of the same body? How unseemly and monstrous would it be, if like Nebuchadnezzar's image, while the head is of pure gold, some of the members should be no better than "miry clay!"

Fourthly. This conformity to Jesus is the natural tendency and result of all Christian graces, and of course is necessary to prove their sincerity. Can we heartily believe in Christ, or realize the spiritual beauty and glory of his character, without being changed into the same image, without springing forward with holy emulation to transcribe his excellent qualities? Can we heartily acquiesce and trust in his mediatorial righteousness, as the ground of our justification, without seeing the beauty and glory of this righteousness, as magnifying and honouring God's perfections and law, and being cordially pleased, and conformed to it? Can we truly rely on Christ to save us from sin and its threatened punishment, without joining with him in heartily condemning the former, and justifying the latter? Have we a believing hope of spiritual and eternal blessings to be dispensed through Christ to us, in conformity to the grace and glory, which are in him? Will not this hope engage us to purify ourselves, even as he is pure; that so we may be both qualified for, and entitled to the expected felicity? Finally, who does not know that love has an assimilating influence? And will it not have the greater energy here, as the love of Christ to us led him in the first place to conform himself to our degraded and miserable state, that he might conform us to his own glory and blessedness? Must not grateful affection on our part produce corresponding returns? Must it not prompt our best efforts to copy so bright and endearing a pattern?

Fifthly. The honour of our religion and its great Author is deeply concerned in this matter. If the professors of Christianity practically contradict the holy example of its Founder, they essentially injure not only themselves, but their profession. If they are habitually

proud, revengeful, covetous, unjust, intemperate, or ungodly; the world will be apt to view their religion and Master as patronizing or fostering these vices. If we have the generous spirit of Christians, we cannot willingly contribute to such vile imputations on the best religion and Master in the world. On the contrary, we shall feel a tender and earnest solicitude, that the excellent spirit and life of our absent Lord may still shine forth to the admiration of the world, in the corresponding temper and practice of his followers, and that thus the honour and influence of his name and gospel may be preserved and extended through all countries and generations. As nothing has hindered the universal propagation of Christianity so much, as the unchristian spirit and manners of those individuals and public bodies, who profess this religion; so nothing would contribute so powerfully to honour the gospel, and extend its triumph, as a striking moral resemblance in its professors to the example of their Head.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. If Christ was so perfect a pattern of virtue, his pretensions to a divine mission must have been founded in truth. For it is highly absurd and contradictory to suppose, that a person of so excellent a character should practise the most impious and cruel fraud in the name of the God of truth and love, or that a series of such pure and noble actions, as are recorded of Jesus, should proceed from a vile and abandoned impostor. Besides, our Saviour's extraordinary pretensions and actions are supported by the same evidence as his amiable moral virtues: to profess therefore, as many deists do, an admiration of the latter, while we reject the former, is either very weak or hypocritical.

2. Hence the main scope of the gospel is *practical;* for it is intended to make us conformable to its Founder.

3. Hence Christianity unspeakably excels all other religions; since it exhibits a personal, visible, and complete representation of the invisible God, and a perfect pattern of virtue for man.

4. How ought this to recommend to our studious attention the life of Jesus, as drawn by the evangelists! With what diligence should we both contemplate and copy its excellencies! How carefully should we examine our tempers and lives by this standard! We are to judge of our real Christianity, not by our orthodox notions, our former imaginary conversion or experiences, or our transient or periodical feelings, but by our steady practical imitation of Jesus; for if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

## Sermon XVII.

# Religious Joy explained and recommended.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 4.

*Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice.*

THAT Christianity is a friend to human happiness, appears from numberless circumstances; particularly from this, that good men are so frequently invited and commanded to *rejoice*, to exercise and cherish one of the most delightful affections of the soul. We must, however, remember, that the joy, which the Scriptures enjoin, is of a peculiar kind; such as the bulk of mankind neither know, desire, nor pursue. It is a joy *in the Lord;* it has God for its object and source; it springs from religious principles, exercises, and prospects; it is one of the highest privileges as well, as duties of real Christians, as it equally expresses and improves both their holiness and happiness.

In discoursing, therefore, on the pleasing and reiterated precept of the text, I will endeavour,

I. To explain, and

II. To recommend and enforce it.

In the first place, we will explain the nature of rejoicing in the Lord.

Now, in general, it imports a cordial acquiescence and delight in the divine character, government, and benefits. Holy joy is primarily founded on the essential

beauty and glory of the divine nature and attributes; and implies a heartfelt satisfaction and triumph in contemplating the existence, perfection, and dominion of Jehovah.

The pious man rejoices in the *existence* of such a being as God. While he hears God saying in his word and works, "I am, and there is none beside me;" his heart echoes its joyful amen: "Lord, I believe, I see, I feel that thou art, and I exult in the belief. Could I once suppose, with some modern vain philosophers, that there is no first, self-existent, all perfect Being at the head of the universe, what a scene of darkness, and confusion, and wretchedness, would the face of the world exhibit! All the charms of the visible heavens and earth would at once fade on my sight. But I see and feel myself surrounded with Deity. I see and admire God in the sun, moon, and stars, in every object and occurrence around me. In all his creatures and works, I have a bright and transporting view of his glorious existence."

The pious heart is also unspeakably delighted with all the *perfections* of this infinite Being. When he hears God saying, "I am that I am," possessed of the most sublime, incommunicable, eternal perfection and blessedness, his heart eagerly replies, "Lord, I sincerely rejoice in that fulness of glory and bliss, which resides in thy adorable essence, and thus in some degree participate and enjoy thy divine felicity. While I feel a benevolent and joyful interest in the derived, the scanty excellence and happiness of my fellow creatures; shall I not much more rejoice in my Creator, on account of his uncaused, his transcendent glory and blessedness? Shall I not rejoice in the idea, that supreme wisdom and power, rectitude and goodness are continually adminis-

tering the affairs of the universe in the best possible manner, and overruling its present partial evils and disorders to the final good of the system and glory of its Author?"

Further, the true friend of God rejoices in all the *manifestations* of his excellent character and will. The heart, which loves and delights in the divine perfections, will desire and be pleased with the display, and the reflected glory of these perfections. Hence the good man rejoices in the word of God, which is the most clear and perfect exhibition of his nature, counsels, and will. He discerns the characters of divinity in the volume of Scripture as well, as of nature; in the sublime doctrines, the holy precepts, the precious promises, and majestic discoveries of the former as well, as in the admirable order and beauty, magnificence and utility of the latter. He therefore exclaims, "Oh, how I love thy law! It is my meditation day and night. I love to trace thy footsteps wherever I can find them. In the commands and sanctions of thy law, I see a bright transcript of thy moral excellencies, and a perfect rule to direct me how to serve and honour thee. In the peculiar truths of thy gospel I behold a still more complete as well, as more endearing display, of thy perfections and designs. In these I see, with mingled admiration and joy, a most wonderful and effectual method to recover thy degenerate offspring to thine image and favour; I rejoice in this scheme of salvation, because while it brings peace and good will to men, it proclaims glory to God in the highest. I rejoice in Christ Jesus, the Gospel Saviour, because he is the express image of the invisible God, and the perfect refulgence of his glory."

On the same principle, the pious Christian delights in the ordinances and duties of religion, because they are

the medium, by which he approaches, honours, and enjoys his heavenly Father. And while he thus rejoices in the present imperfect exercises of religion, as means of this divine communion; he is equally delighted with the hope of its approaching consummation in that world, where he will behold and love, glorify and enjoy the infinite Jehovah in a perfect and progressive manner forever and ever.

Thus the good man's joy begins, centers, and terminates in God himself; in contemplating, resembling, and honouring him, and receiving corresponding returns of his favour. So that the glory of God and the happiness of his friends are harmoniously and indissolubly united. The saint has no true joy separate from glorifying God; and so far as he feels a temper of love to, and satisfaction in God, he is necessarily happy; and this happiness at once reflects glory upon its benevolent author and object, and furnishes its subject with new incentives and advantages to serve and praise him.

How different are the feelings of holy Christians from those of ungodly or hypocritcal characters! The habitual, the hardened sinner, far from being pleased with the existence and character of the Most High, dreads and hates the idea of him, because his nature is holy. The pulse and wish of a wicked man's heart are, therefore, on the side of atheism. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." And the counterfeit, deluded pretender to religion, though he may seem to overflow with spiritual joy, yet does not really rejoice *in God*, but in himself. He rejoices, not in the infinite majesty, beauty, and felicity of the divine nature; but in his own fancied dignity and goodness, his own imaginary religious experiences and attainments, privileges and prospects. Of course his joy begins and ends in himself; it is the

spurious offspring of pride, self love, and self deception.

But it is necessary to add, though true joy primarily fixes on God himself, it does not exclude, but implies, the consideration of his benefits. As the good man is supremely delighted with the essential glories of Deity; so he consequentially and subordinately rejoices in his own interest in him, in the evidence of his special and everlasting favour. With what unutterable delight does he breathe out that exulting language, "*This God is* MY *God forever and ever.* His unerring wisdom is my unfailing guide; his omnipotent arm is my constant shield; his infinite goodness, beauty, and love are my satisfying and everlasting portion!" What a new, additional charm must this appropriating joy in God as our Friend impart to all the streams even of his common bounty! How unspeakably estimable and sweet is the least mercy, when we can view it as the gift of a most excellent, generous, beloved Patron and Father!

How essentially does the pleasure, which the pious man takes even in the common entertainments of life, differ from that of the sensual and profane! The sensitive enjoyments of the one are refined by the rational and sublime pleasures of thankful devotion, which forms the crowning ingredient of his pleasures; while those of the other are merely natural, selfish, and brutal. The Christian brings to the entertainment, that inward sweetness, contentment, and gladness of heart, which flow from the love and blessing of God, and which give a rich and delightful flavour to the meanest enjoyment. "Go thy way," says Solomon, "eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy work." Since God accepteth and blesseth the righteous man, no wonder that joy and gladness,

thanksgiving and the voice of melody, are found in his habitation; for God himself is there as a constant guest. But since the secret curse of God is upon the wicked man, and all that he has, it must blast every enjoyment, and either immediately or ultimately turn it into gall, and wormwood, and death.

The religious joy of the saint is also an effectual *regulator* of his inferior delights. While he cheerfully participates in the innocent pleasures which his heavenly Parent sets before him; he endeavours to enjoy them like a man and a Christian; with a cautious moderation and sobriety; so as not to violate or lose either his reason or religion; so as not to be transported into idle levity, thoughtless folly, or intemperate excess; so as not to sacrifice the pure and sublime joys resulting from the favour and enjoyment of his God, to these perishing delights. Then we act in character as Christians; then we truly rejoice in the Lord; when we sacredly regard this rule, to rejoice in worldly good as though we rejoiced not; to use the world as not abusing it; and constantly to restrict all our other pleasures by a supreme regard to, and delight in, our Maker. But carnal men reverse this rule. They devote themselves to earthly enjoyments in an unbounded degree; they centre their whole happiness in them; they sacrifice to them their reason and conscience, their present virtue and peace, and their future immortal hopes.

Further, The joy of the Christian in the bounties of Heaven is a modest and humble affection, arising from a proper sense of his dependence on God for them, and his sinful unworthiness, forfeiture, and abuse of them. Accordingly, while religious joy soars as high as heaven in adoring gratitude and praise for the condescending and wonderful goodness of God; it sinks as low as the

dust in penitent humiliation for its own conscious vileness and ill-desert. But the joy of unsanctified men, on such occasions, is a proud and independent feeling; which swells them into imaginary deities, and leads them to ascribe their enjoyments to their own sagacity, industry, or merit.

In a word, true joy in the divine benefits, while it elevates the heart to the infinite Giver, inspires greater zeal and alacrity in his service, and a keener relish for the enjoyment of him. "Can I," says the good man, "go on to offend that God, who is daily feasting me with his beneficence? Shall I not with pious gratitude reflect back on their great Original the innumerable cheering beams of divine goodness, which are shining upon me? Shall I not, by ardent love and vigorous obedience, return to the infinite Fountain, that full tide of joy, which is daily flowing into my heart? Shall I not testify my cheerful gratitude to my divine Benefactor by imitating his diffusive and disinterested goodness; by imparting to his creatures the same gladness, which he is communicating to me; by improving the talents and blessings which he confers upon me in promoting the happiness of his rational family? If the little rivulets of pleasure, which comfort my earthly pilgrimage, be so delicious, what must it be to have an intimate, perfect, and everlasting enjoyment of their uncreated Source! Let my taste of the former, then, continually increase my relish and preparation for the latter."

Thus we see that religious joy is not a mere speculative sentiment, or rapturous feeling of the mind; much less a transient, mechanical flash of the animal affections; but such a steady, delightful union of the heart to the divine character, as engages us to resemble and honour it by a correspondent practice; and such pure

gratitude for divine benefits, as greatly improves our attachment to, and cooperation with, their benevolent author; and awakens our cheerful activity in serving God and our generation.

I must add, true joy in the Lord is a *constant* and *perpetual* affection. It does not vary with outward circumstances, but subsists the same, amid all the vicissitudes of life. Some may be ready to ask, Is the command in the text seasonable and binding at all times, even in scenes of great adversity and distress? Is it suitable, or indeed possible, to rejoice in such circumstances? We instantly reply in the affirmative. For since the great object, foundation, and materials of this joy are unchanging and everlasting; and since the soul, which is its subject or recipient, is immortal; the exercise of it should be stable and permanent. It ought not to be disturbed by the greatest external changes. When we are deprived of other sources of comfort, still we may and must rejoice in the Lord; for the fountain, which feeds this joy, never ceases to flow. Agreeably, Saint Paul charges Christians in the text, and elsewhere, to rejoice in the Lord *always;* to rejoice *evermore;* to give thanks *always for all things*. And he describes himself and his fellow professors in the primitive age of Christianity, amidst all their uncommon sufferings, *as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing*. Though this may sound like a strange paradox to common ears; yet it does not in the least grate the ears of Christian believers; who are taught to view God, his government, and promises, as unchangeably wise, benevolent, and faithful.

If the Christian be afflicted in his body by sickness or pain, which incapacitates him for enjoying the world; yet his soul, being in a healthful state, may enjoy both itself and its God. When a good man, indeed, is lan-

guishing under disease, and his animal and mental spirits are low; he cannot ordinarily exert such vigorous and sensible emotions, even of spiritual joy, as when his body is in tune for assisting and joining with his soul in these divine exercises. Much less can this be expected, when he is visited with sharp and torturing pains. But if in such a situation he can possess a calm, though not an impassioned joy; if he can serenely trust, acquiesce and delight in God; this must be owned an invaluable privilege, and a mighty support. Now this attainment a pious man may and ought to make. When his flesh and his heart fail him under the pressure of disease, he may and should confide and rejoice in God, as the strength of his heart and his portion forever. When he feels his earthly tabernacle tottering, and ready to drop into the dust; he may exult in the prospect of a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. When his body can no longer be the subject or avenue of any satisfaction, he can retire inward, and feast on those rational, moral, and divine pleasures, which are peculiar to the soul; and may triumph in the thought, that his immortal spirit will soon exchange its present uncomfortable prison for a more free and congenial habitation, where it will enjoy itself and its proper entertainments in an uninterrupted and perfect manner.

If the Christian be oppressed with worldly losses and calamities, he may still say with the prophet, "Although the figtree do not blossom, and there be no fruit in the vine;" though my earthly possessions and prospects fail; "yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation." He may still say with the apostle; "I have nothing, and yet possess all things." For having God for my treasure, I have enough; I have all and abound: I possess an inward fund of riches and sat-

isfaction, which has no dependence on the world; which does not ebb and flow with that restless and tempestuous sea."

We may rise one step higher, and say, that the true saint may and ought to rejoice in God even in the midst of spiritual darkness and distress; in the midst of painful doubts and fears respecting his own interest in the divine favour. Though he cannot, in such a case, rejoice in God as his assured friend; yet his mind may be entertained with affectionate and delightful views of the perfect rectitude, glory, and blessedness of the Deity, the complete fitness and beauty of his whole plan both of providence and grace, and the excellent issue to which all his proceedings are harmoniously tending. When a person of a sanctified taste thus contemplates with suitable affections, the beauty of divine objects, he has a direct and noble enjoyment of them. If he dares not claim a special interest in them, he still relishes and rejoices in their intrinsic excellence. If his heavenly Father still seems to frown upon him, and withholds from him the sensible tokens of his love; yet he still cleaves to him with filial attachment; he resolutely maintains a spirit of dutiful submission to, of trust and delight in, the divine character and government; and is far more concerned to honour God by a proper behaviour in, and improvement of, his present affliction, than merely to obtain light and comfort for himself. A person, who habitually possesses these exalted views and feelings, must derive from them perpetual tranquillity and cheerfulness, even in the darkest hours of distress. May almighty grace inspire us all with this temper and this blessedness.

## Sermon XVIII.

# Religious Joy explained and recommended.

PHILIPPIANS IV. 4.

*Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice.*

HAVING largely explained the nature of religious joy, it remains, agreeably to our plan, that we now recommend and enforce the practice of it.

When the apostle repeatedly exhorts good men to rejoice in God, he evidently implies that spiritual joy is one of their greatest privileges and duties. In both these lights I will endeavour to recommend it to your earnest cultivation and pursuit.

First. It is one of the Christian's noblest prerogatives and blessings. For the object of this joy is the most excellent in the universe: for who or what in the heavens or earth is to be compared to the Lord? When we offer to make a comparison between God and other beings, there is nothing which appears great or estimable, but all things seem equally little, none of them bearing the smallest conceivable proportion to the infinite Being: so that the whole universe in this view appears less than nothing and vanity. This incomprehensibly great and glorious Being is the object of the Christian's joy: and must not that joy, which terminates on such an object, be preferable to any other? Must not our joy vary with its object; be low or high, mean or excellent, in propor-

tion to it? Consequently, where the object is of infinite worth, must not the joy have a kind of infinity in it; a value, a grandeur, a sublimity, which is unspeakable? must not that joy, which embraces and exults in such a pure, immutable, allsufficient, inexhaustible source of excellence and good, partake in some measure of, or at least correspond with, the divine properties of its object, and so be a pure, permanent, satisfying, overflowing spring of delight?

Especially when we consider, that the seat of this joy is the noblest in its kind as well, as the object: for it dwells in the highest and purest region of the soul. The soul is superior to the whole world. As much superior is the soul to itself, when it rejoices in the Lord, beyond what it is when it rejoices in earthly good. Its sublimest faculties, raised and refined by the grace of God, and acting in the most perfect manner, are requisite, to apprehend and enjoy this most transcendent Object. The soul lets itself down, and contracts its thoughts and designs in conversing with other objects; but here it swells, and dilates all its powers and passions. In most other joys, it stoops beneath itself; here it rises above itself, above its natural pitch. The Spirit of God opens the eyes of the understanding, sheds a supernatural light upon it, awakens its latent powers, and endues it with new activity. The abode of this sacred joy is not like this inferior region, where the atmosphere is thick, frequently void of light, and engenders storms and tempests, and a variety of diseases; but like the superior part of the heavens, where there is perpetual day, and undisturbed calm, and the etherial fluid is unmixed and unpolluted. Such is the seat of this holy joy compared with that where sensual appetites and joys are placed.

Let me add, that the effects of this joy are most extensive, beneficial, and lasting. "The joy of the Lord is our strength." It fortifies the soul, and inspires a vigour and courage unknown to others, which make it victorious over all the power of the enemy. It is exceedingly perfective of our nature; begets high aims, generous sentiments and dispositions, holy desires and aspirations. Nothing can improve the mind like this divine joy; like the contemplation of God and delighting in him. It brings the soul nearer to God, both in holiness and happiness. This joy is not confined to place or time. God being every where, we can every where rejoice in him. Being the disposer of our condition, whatever it be, we can, in every condition, rejoice in him. Whatever else we are doing, if it be not displeasing to God, we may still rejoice in him. This joy is never unseasonable, never out of place; and (which crowns all) never decays. The impression is not fleeting and transient, as in other joys; but durable like the soul, and everlasting as the foundation on which it rests. All which shews the greatness and excellence of this privilege and felicity.

Secondly. It is a privilege peculiar to real saints; they only are qualified for, and entitled to this joy. No others have the requisite qualifications; which are, likeness and love to the Object. A likeness of temper and manners is the main foundation and cement of human friendships; which are seldom carried to any height, and still seldomer prove lasting, where the parties do not agree in their reigning inclinations. The same is still more necessary in this divine friendship between God and the soul: for the soul is utterly incapable of delighting in God, and God in the soul, till his image is drawn anew upon it, and they both relish and delight

in the same things. Then, and not before, they will delight in each other. Now since this is true of none but renewed, sanctified persons, the privilege of rejoicing in God is necessarily limited to them; and so much the more as likeness is ever joined with love. Can we rejoice in God, while we do not love him? Or can we love him, while we are prevailingly unlike and contrary to him? What enjoyment can there be without love? What love without mutual resemblance?

It is a contradiction that beings should at the same time hate and delight in one another. But this is the state of all natural men. There is a mutual hatred between God and them; they hate God, as a holy, just, sin revenging Governor and Judge; and he abhors them as unholy, wicked creatures: and the enmity, being mutual, must be an everlasting bar to mutual joy. But every renewed, pious soul loves God, is a hearty friend to his character and interest; and hereby becomes, as it were, one with him, and thus rejoices in his perfection, glory and blessedness, as if they were its own. It longs to unite with God perfectly, to glorify and enjoy him in the highest possible degree: and by these holy, loving desires after perfect enjoyment, it enjoys him even now in part; for these aspirations of divine love and joy are an earnest and prelibation of perfect, beatific fruition in glory.

And, as this spiritual joy must be peculiar to the upright, because they alone are capable of it, being the only persons qualified for it, so they only have a title to it. For the same holy dispositions, which constitute our qualifications for this privilege, are required by God as conditions of our right to it. And with very good reason; for certainly it would not become the Divine Wisdom to give a man a title to a thing, for which he was not prepared, were it for no other reason than this, that a right in

this case, though to the greatest treasure in the universe, could be of no advantage, any more than the gift of light to the blind.

In short, none are entitled by divine constitution to the privilege of rejoicing in the Lord, but those who have an interest in Christ. If we Christians "joy in God," it is "through our Lord Jesus Christ," by whom we have received the atonement. Christ has made atonement for the sins of mankind; but all have not *received* the atonement, have not complied with the true spirit and design of it, and with the appointed conditions of an interest in it; consequently, all such persons are as much in a state of guilt and condemnation, as if no atonement had been made and offered, and therefore have no right to joy in God through Christ. Here the mighty difference between the happy few and the wretched multitude takes its rise. But few are cordial friends to a crucified, atoning Saviour; but few have that humble, penitent, affectionate faith in him, which is connected with a saving union to his person, and title to his benefits. But few therefore are in a pardoned, justified state, and so have a right to call God *their* God and portion, and to glory and triumph in him as such. The greater number even of nominal Christians, being (as it is to be feared) "without Christ," of course neither have a right to, nor a moral capacity for, rejoicing in the Lord.

Having seen that it is the privilege of good men to rejoice in God, it remains that we shew,

Thirdly, That it is also their *duty* thus to rejoice. That joy, which religion confers, as a privilege and felicity, it commands us to accept, to cherish, and improve. It requires the daily exercise of holy joy, as a necessary proof of our sincerity; since without this our religion must be essentially deficient, both in principle and practice.

First, in *principle;* for did faith, or hope, or love rule the heart, they could not fail to produce pleasure and joy in the service of God. We naturally delight in contemplating, pleasing, imitating, and honouring a friend whom we love. If then we feel no habitual joy in God, it argues the want of love to him. So that if we exclude joy in God from our religion, we shut out love, and have no motives to it but fear and self-interest, which are low and unsuitable principles, on which to serve and obey such a Being as the infinite Jehovah? a Being, who deserves and demands our hearts, yea, our whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.

Secondly, in *practice:* for neither life, zeal, nor perseverance in duty are to be expected from him, whose heart is a stranger to delight in God and his ways. He applies himself to religion as a task. He dreads the taskmaster, but will labour no more than necessity requires. Such a religion as this is essentially different from the homage of him, who worships the Father in spirit and in truth.

Estimate then the genuineness of your religion, both in principle and practice, by the satisfaction and joy which you find in God and his service. Be assured, that where your treasure is, there will your highest joy be. As the worldly man rejoices in his earthly possessions, the voluptuous man in his sensual pleasures, and the social in his friends and companions; so the truly good man rejoices in his God, in the divine perfections, government, precepts, and promises. This is what he owes both to God and religion, to himself, and to others.

Hence in order to reach this attainment or practise this duty in the happiest manner, he ought to take every step, which may tend to beget, maintain, and increase

this holy joy, or to put his mind into a right frame for the exercise of it. As,

First, He ought to make his calling and election sure; and by impartial self-inquiry come to a decision of the great question, whose servant or child he is. For if he is the true child and servant of God, nothing is necessary to his rejoicing in him, but his knowing it. If I know that God is my father, and that I serve him as a son serveth his father, from a pure, filial affection to him, as the principle of my obedience, and in hope of his paternal acceptance and favour, as the utmost reward of it; it is impossible but that I should esteem this a reasonable ground of joy in God, and as such derive high satisfaction from it. It is therefore my duty to endeavour to know this, and not remain uncertain in a concern of such infinite moment, when I may with due care and pains arrive at satisfaction in it.

"No man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man which is in him;" which implies that the spirit of a man may know its own things, if it apply itself diligently to know them. And what are those things of a man, which the spirit within him may come to understand? What but the things which most nearly concern him, the things of his peace, the things which accompany salvation? And how shall his spirit know these things, but by descending into itself, and communing with itself; examining what is the chief object of its love and hatred; which way it most strongly inclines; what it sets up as its supreme good, and by what, in case of competition, he would abide, so as to part with all other things to secure it? Can I say, that God is my center and my end; the end of all my actions, and the center of my rest? If so, I have reason to conclude, and rejoice in my sincerity, and

to rejoice in God, as approving and accepting me! This then is the first duty of Christians in this affair, to endeavour to be satisfied of their right to rejoice in God, in order to their being about actually to do it.

Secondly. It is their duty to remove out of the way whatever they have found, or have reason to think, is a hinderance to this holy joy; particularly, a multitude of worldly cares, and a too free indulgence of worldly joys.

Worldly *cares*, when they run high and grow numerous, prey upon the very life and strength of the soul: its force is spent upon them, so that it has no spirit left for the exercises of devotion; and when duties are spiritless, no wonder they are joyless too. Good men are often very faulty in this matter: they care for the things of the world more than they need or ought: they have too many cares, or they sink too deep into their hearts. Such persons should not wonder that they receive no more satisfaction from meditating on divine objects, which in themselves are adapted to give the most exquisite delight. They must discharge the train of cumberous cares, which now absorb their minds, before the joy of the Lord will enter and possess them.

They must also beware of a too free indulgence of worldly and sensitive *joys*, even those which are in themselves innocent: for this is not the only thing to be considered by the Christian; namely, the bare lawfulness of any pleasure or satisfaction, abstractedly taken: but do I give myself up to it? If not wholly, yet to a much greater degree than I should? By these means it gets the mastery of my soul; takes up the room which ought to be filled with better entertainments, sensualizes and debases my taste, and thereby indisposes me for the fruition of those purer joys, which religion bestows on all, who truly desire and seek them. It is very true that

other joys, when of a lawful nature, and lawfully used, i. e. with moderation, are subservient to religion, and promote our joy in God. But it is far otherwise, when we make pleasure of any kind not so much our diversion, as our business; when our passions are warmly engaged by it, and we are no longer easy than while our circumstances enable us to command the returns of it. Religious joy has a happy influence on our common joys, to guide and moderate them: and when it has not this effect, but through our own negligence, or the great force of temptation to sensual pleasure, the heart lets itself out to those low delights, such fleshly pleasures have a sad influence on our religious joys, so that the stream abates in this channel in the same proportion, as it swells in the other; for it cannot at the same time rise to any great height in both.

Thirdly. It is the duty of Christians to *stir up their souls* to rejoice in the Lord. They are not to allow themselves in a heartless, melancholy frame: they must not give way to it, as if it were a temper of mind acceptable to God and creditable to religion; but must endeavour to chide themselves out of it, expostulating with their own souls, as the psalmist does with his. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God." They ought to arise and exert all their vigour in combating and expelling these gloomy, melancholy ideas and passions, which are such enemies to the peace of their souls, and the pleasure and credit of their religion. If they will not seek comfort with diligence in God's way, how can they expect to find it? Do they think that God will, by an extraordinary operation of his Spirit, create a bright and peaceful day

within them, while they do all they can to hinder its admission? Are they not in this case guilty at once of inexcuseable sloth and presumption, and justly punished with a denial of that joy, which they do not labour to obtain?

Fourthly. They must make this a frequent petition in their addresses to the throne of grace, that God would give them the joy of his salvation, and uphold them with his free Spirit: that he, who is the Father of lights, would dart some beams of heavenly light into their souls, that they may not sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, but walk and rejoice in the light of life: that he, who is the fountain of comfort and blessedness, would speak peace to their troubled thoughts, would calm their tumultuous passions, and enable them to act all the graces, perform all the duties, and enjoy all the entertainments of the divine life, with high relish and delight. "Thou hast made it my duty, O my God, to rejoice in thee. And since thou hast made it my duty, I believe thou art ready to give me grace to perform it. I therefore apply to thee for light to guide me continually in that course, which will bring me this inward joy."

These are some of the steps, which Christians may and should take, in order to be in the best preparation and disposition of mind for rejoicing in the Lord. And that all this is their incumbent duty, is evident, not only from the text and similar precepts, but from such considerations as these:

First. The credit of religion obliges them to it. What will the enemies of God and religion say, when they see the most conscientious friends to both, appearing from day to day with a visible sadness and gloom on their countenances and deportment, as if they had no enjoyment of themselves; but were some of the most

forlorn and wretched of mortals? Will they not be apt to say, surely the yoke of Christ is not what he has represented it, an easy yoke, and his burden light: no; his service must be a wearisome, or at best an insipid thing. And not only the professed enemies of religion will be tempted to talk in this strain, but others too, who might have embraced a life of virtue and piety, had it not been held up to them in so frightful a dress by the notions and behaviour of some well meaning but mistaking Christians; these too will be prejudiced against religion. They, of all men, have the fairest title to, and the greatest reason, capacity, and fund of joy and delight; for who should rejoice, if they do not and must not, who act up to their character as men and as Christians; who in the main keep a good conscience both toward God and man? Joy and satisfaction are the natural as well, as promised reward of such a life. Who should rejoice, if they may not, who have God for their chief good and felicity, Christ for their way to it, the Holy Spirit as their qualifier for and earnest of it, and heaven for their everlasting home, in which they are to possess and enjoy it? How can such persons reflect on all this, and not rejoice? Certainly, they would be exceedingly to be blamed, if they did not rejoice.

And if there be this inward joy, it will express itself in the outward conversation. An easy mind, a contented, joyful heart cannot be concealed. All a man's words and actions will be tinctured with it. Like the ointment of the right hand (a sweet perfume, chafed with the heat of the hand) it will bewray itself, and diffuse its fragrance all around. And it is fit that it should. Christians ought not, if able, to throw a veil of pensive sadness over the tranquillity and joy of their hearts. This would not be humility, but affectation: it

would not adorn religion, but disgrace it; and consequently would not be pleasing and honourary to God, but the reverse.

Secondly. The Spirit is communicated for this end, that we might rejoice in the Lord; and is therefore called "the *Comforter*." And as this, so his other titles, of a "free Spirit," the "Spirit of adoption," the "Spirit of glory," all signify his being imparted with this design, that we should rejoice and glory in that blessed state into which by the grace of God we are translated. The fruit of the Spirit is love, and joy, and peace. These are the affections, which constitute happiness; and these are the affections, which both the gospel and the Spirit of Christ are given to raise and promote. Christians are bound to love God and one another; and where this divine affection is triumphant, joy and peace are always found in its train.

Then let not any of the followers of Christ entertain such an erroneous thought, as if a sorrowful, dejected spirit, were the true, the genuine spirit of Christianity. Sorrow for sin, there ought to be; but this sorrow, when it is after a godly sort, is not inconsistent with joy, but implies and produces it. It implies it, as it involves the exercise of love to God, whom by sin we have offended, a pleasing faith, and hope in his forgiving mercy through the Mediator, the acting and consciousness of a right disposition toward sin and holiness: all which afford immediate and unspeakable delight. It produces it, as it is the condition and evidence of a state of pardon and peace with God. On both accounts, godly sorrow, far from excluding, is the seed of spiritual joy.

Thirdly. This joy tends very much to the advancement of the divine life in the soul. In this sense, the joy of the Lord is the strength of the righteous. It greatly

confirms them in the ways of piety, fortifies their holy resolutions, and supports them in times of trouble. The Christian, whose religion yields him little or no peace and pleasure, is not so likely to be zealously affected in it, or to go on with any speed toward perfection.

Would you then abound in the work of the Lord, and in the fruits of righteousness to his glory? Would you have all the powers of your soul invigorated? Would you improve in every divine virtue, and perform every duty in the most acceptable manner? Then labour to keep up a spirit of holy joy and cheerfulness. It is your duty to do this as much, as it is your duty to be still advancing in religion; since you cannot expect the latter without the former. Is not the Christian life represented as a race and a pilgrimage? Are we not travelling toward Zion? But what speed can we make with a continual load of sadness and dejection upon our spirits? How can we run the race set before us? How be otherwise than weary and faint in our minds? Wherefore let us lift up the hands that hang down and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for our feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way. Let us thus rejoice in God through Jesus Christ, though not without a humbling sense of our great unworthiness and numberless defects. Then we shall find ourselves much more lively and active in religion; and being freed from that burden, under which we were before ready to sink, shall *run* in the way of God's commands, and mount up toward heaven as on the wings of eagles.

## IMPROVEMENT.

*In the first place*, what a charming idea does our subject give of true religion, especially under the Christian

dispensation! Even under all the darkness, restrictions, and terrors of the law, good men were acquainted with spiritual joy; and some of them on ancient record, particularly David, expressed their holy joy, in the most elevated language. But under the gospel, religion appears in its brightest and fairest light, and is eminently adapted to beget all joy and peace, in those who believe and duly entertain it. No one can think or speak evil of the religion of Christ, who rightly understands it. For what is its main design, but to restore us to God and to ourselves, to our true perfection and happiness? Let us only, at present, take notice of its tendency to promote our well being, both in this life and the next, by the provision it has made for the due government and exercise of our affections. These affections may be considered with regard both to action and enjoyment.

The two chief springs of *action* are hope and fear; the two principal sources of *enjoyment*, or ingredients of felicity, are love and joy. As to the first pair of these affections, no religion can possibly be better adapted to awaken and regulate these, than the Christian. For what will awaken our hope, if the prospect of such a blessedness as the gospel sets before us, which is consummate and endless, will not do it? What can reasonably awaken our fears, like the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men? And what method can be proposed for the regulation of our other hopes and fears, so likely and effectual as this, of making them all subservient to those hopes and fears, which terminate on things invisible and eternal? And the end of exciting our fear as well, as hope, being this, that we may hereby be engaged to a right temper and conduct, the gospel, even in its threatenings as well, as promises, has a very benign and friendly aspect.

The same may be remarked concerning our love and joy, on which our fruition of happiness more immediately depends. Were our souls under the powerful influence of that love, which the gospel aims to kindle in our breasts, the love of God and of Jesus; and did we experience more of that inward joy, to which we are so frequently and earnestly invited by God himself, we should be more truly and eminently happy, than we now are; and should not be in so much danger of pursuing the empty, fugitive phantoms of happiness, which this world presents. I may add, the higher degrees we enjoyed of this divine happiness, the more steady and unshaken would be the adherence of our souls to the supreme good; and the main objects of our love and joy, being wisely chosen and deeply fixed, would so direct and overrule our love of inferior things and delight in them, as to keep them within the bounds of reason; beyond which they only occasion greater disquietude and vexation.

What just ground, then, can any have to entertain an ill opinion of religion, of the Christian religion? It is true Christianity obliges us to mortify our members which are upon the earth. But these members are only certain excrescences of our nature, irregular lusts and passions, which are as incompatible with our peace and happiness, as with our duty. "Mortify your members which are on the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." This shows, that though these corrupt inclinations are styled our members, they do not belong to our primitive or our renewed nature, but only to the corruption of it. It is further granted, that Christianity carries virtue to its highest pitch; that it enjoins such heights of purity and divine love, that it is

no easy thing to be a Christian indeed. But what does this prove? Not that the religion of Jesus is not adapted to the felicity of this life, but the reverse; for it lays no other burden upon us, than what is, in its own nature, reasonable, necessary, and beneficial, and what would be no burden at all, were it not for our own depravity. It aims only to remove what would incapacitate us for true pleasure; and when it obliges us to be holy in all manner of conversation, to be perfect and pure as God and Christ are; it does it upon this ground, that such holiness and perfection are the true glory and happiness of our reasonable natures, which alone can enable us to rejoice in God. Godliness has the promise of this life as well, as of that which is to come; not indeed of the pride and incumbrance of life, of worldly affluence, greatness, pleasure; but of that happiness, which suits a reasonable nature, and the design of our Christian profession.

In short, the glory of God in the happiness of men is the great object and end of Christianity, in the whole system of its doctrines, precepts and sanctions. It is true that our everlasting happiness in the next life is principally intended, as it ought to be; but then the happiness of this life is consulted and promoted as far, as is consistent with the other, which is infinitely more important. And I may safely affirm, that it is richly worthy of the wisest man's choice to be a Christian, merely on the score of the present felicity, which attends such a character.

*In the second place*, are we acquainted with that habitual, holy joy in the Lord, which is the peculiar character and privilege as well, as the constant duty of the righteous? Is God himself, in the infinite glory of his perfections and government, the primary object of our

joy? Can we cordially rejoice in every thing, which relates to this most excellent Being? Does our joy in God possess a decided superiority over, and, as it were, perfume and consecrate, all our other joys? And is it a constant and permanent thing? Are we qualified and capacitated for this spiritual joy, by a prevailing likeness and love to the object? Are we entitled to it by a vital union to Christ, the great medium and procurer of this privilege?

*In the third place*, to such as find themselves destitute of any title to, qualifications for, or experience of, this joy, let me briefly say; Your condition at present resembles that of the starving prodigal in a strange land, at a distance from his father's house, associating with swine, feeding upon husks, perishing with hunger. Perhaps some of you are now triumphing in the pleasing enjoyments and prospects, which a flattering world presents to her prosperous votaries, especially in the blooming gaiety of youthful life. But, my friends, look forward to the end of this bright and fascinating career of worldly joy. Ask the child of earthly pleasure on his death bed, whether this is the course he would recommend to his children and friends; whether with his dying breath he can assure them, that these gratifications really form the greatest enjoyment of life? Will he not tell you, from his own experience, that they are all vanity and vexation; that they are in themselves treacherous, unsound, hollow, disturbed in the very moment of enjoyment; that in the midst of such laughter the heart is sorrowful; that the smile of gaiety is often assumed, while the heart aches within? Whereas religion, by bringing back the wandering soul to God, and placing its love, and hope, and joy in him, produces a heartfelt, habitual, and satisfying delight, a calm, serene

enjoyment, a steady light, shining like that of the sun, more and more unto the perfect day.

Let me, then, earnestly invite and press you to come, taste, and see how good the Lord is; to come, eat of wisdom's bread, and drink of the wine, which she has mingled. Let me call on all those, who have hitherto walked in the way of their own hearts, and have no other pleasures than those, which are merely sensual and earthly, or at best, have been strangers to the superior delights of communion with God; to all such I call, to seek after that divine joy, which religion offers and gives to her children. Oh, seek after that renovation of heart to the likeness and love of God, which is necessary to prepare you to relish and delight in his holy and glorious character. Seek after that faith and interest in Christ, which are requisite to entitle you to this joy. Every motive, taken from time and from eternity, urges you to this; for your whole happiness in both is concerned and wrapped up in it.

Finally. Let true Christians permit me to be their monitor, as to their privilege and duty in this instance. Oh, what a singular privilege do you possess, of being able to rejoice in the Lord, to rejoice in him at all times, in all circumstances! Oh, bless God for making this delightful exercise your constant duty, and thus twisting, or rather uniting, your business and happiness together in one point! What an additional motive is here to the love of God, who has pleasure in the prosperity and joy of his servants! Oh, love the Lord therefore all ye his servants, and constantly delight in him. Let joyful thanksgiving and praise be a main part of your employment here, as it will be your whole and eternal employment in heaven. Watch against every thing,

which would indispose you for the enjoyments of the divine life; and remember, that by intermitting the exercises of the heavenly life you rob yourselves of its pleasures. If any of you, by sloth, carnal indulgences, or any other means, have lost that liveliness and joy in God and religion, which you once had, call to mind whence you are fallen, and what you have lost, and repent, and set yourselves to do your first works, and regain your first love, that you may recover your former joy. Thus, from time to time, you should recollect yourselves, examine the state of your souls, repair any decays, correct any slips you have made, and stir up yourselves to take hold of God and his strength. You have always reason to suspect, that things are greatly amiss within you, when you can take as much pleasure as usual, or more, in other things, but not in God or religion. Oh, seek then to have the joy of the Lord for your constant food and strength; that, under its influence, you may mount up with wings as eagles, and be ripening fast for perfect union, love, and enjoyment in heaven.

# Sermon XIX.

## Delivered at a Concert of Prayer.

MATTHEW vi. 9, 10.

*Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

THAT divine form of devotion, of which these words are a part, is equally distinguished for its brevity and fulness, its plainness and grandeur, its universal suitableness and importance. In these several respects, it unspeakably transcends the highest productions of man. While it unites the interests of heaven and earth, of time and eternity, in six short petitions; it is remarkable that three of these, which compose the first part of the prayer, centre in one great object, viz. the declarative glory of God, consisting in the universal prosperity of his kingdom, and advanced by the general obedience, order, and happiness of his moral subjects. And as the beginning, so the conclusion of this devout summary, is consecrated to this object; for it closes with ascribing the kingdom, the power, and glory to the Deity; and by its significant *amen*, it sums up the feelings of the petitioner in a strong desire and assurance, that God will manifest this his power and glory in the universal establishment of his spiritual kingdom.

The words, then, which I have placed at the head of this discourse, and which comprise the first and crowning part of this perfect model of supplication, are eminently suited to the present occasion; which is not only

a season of united prayer, but is expressly devoted to the object here recommended, viz. the advancement of Christ's kingdom in our world. That our prayers on a subject so sublime and interesting, and our future conduct pursuant to them, may be properly directed and animated, let us attend to the leading instructions, suggested to us in the concise, but weighty petitions above recited. "Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

As names are employed to signify, or convey the knowledge of things, so the name of God, in the text, signifies the Deity himself, as made known by his word, institutions and works. When God was pleased, at the request of his favourite servant, to proclaim his name and to show his glory; these were the ingredients of that comprehensive display—"The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty." This divine name, announced to Moses, and more obscurely published by the ancient prophets, is fully illustrated by Jesus Christ, by the whole series of his actions, sufferings and doctrines; which unitedly exhibit the rich and endearing mercy of Jehovah, in connexion with his awful majesty, justice and truth. While the law and gospel thus publish the name of God, his various works of nature, providence and grace, by harmonizing with and fulfilling his word, add lustre and confirmation to every part of his revealed name, and spread abroad its glory, as the earth and planets receive and reflect the splendour of the sun.

Accordingly, God's name is *hallowed* or consecrated, when it is conspicuously and eminently honoured; just

as the consecrated persons and things under the law were peculiarly dignified by their separation to holy purposes. To pray, therefore, for the sanctification of the divine name, implies a request, that the various attributes, which compose this name, may be displayed and extolled by the whole created universe: in particular, that intelligent creatures, especially the human race, may unitedly offer to their Creator those inward sentiments and outward expressions of veneration and love, which are most suitable and honourary to so glorious an object, and which best comport with the various discoveries of his character; and finally, that he would make all things, even the partial and temporary evils of our system, ultimately conduce to the greatest glory of his name.

The two next clauses of the text, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done," are intimately connected with the first, as means with the end. By God's kingdom here is intended, not his *general* providential government, which has been erected and administered from the creation, and whose coming therefore is not an object of prayer; but his *mediatorial* and *gracious* kingdom. This comprehends that external administration, by which he calls men to the profession of the true religion, and gives them outward laws, ordinances, and privileges; also that internal dominion, by which he effectually subdues, sanctifies, and comforts their hearts, and which the apostle accordingly describes, as consisting in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and finally, that heavenly state of glory, which is the perfection of the two former; for the kingdom of God on earth, both in its visible and invisible duties and blessings, is but a handmaid, or a preparatory discipline to the kingdom of heaven.

When, therefore, we pray that God's kingdom may come, we request the universal spread of the gospel, both in its external and inward dispensation, and the consequent reign of virtue, peace, and felicity, through the whole family of mankind. We ask the full accomplishment of the great plan of mediatorial mercy, not only in the expected glory of the latter days, but in the far more glorious and happy state of things which will finally succeed. And since the honour of a king as well, as the beauty and happiness of his empire, greatly depends on the prompt and entire obedience of his subjects; we pray that the will of our divine Sovereign may be done on earth, as it is in heaven; that is, that it may be performed by us, and by mankind at large, in a manner resembling, as nearly as possible, the obedience of celestial spirits; with the same speed and alacrity, purity and exactness, humility and veneration, constancy and fervour.

As these several petitions thus point to the work of redemption, or the Christian interest, and pray for its general triumph; so they remarkably suit each successive period, or varying condition of the church, from the beginning to this day. During the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations, the coming of God's kingdom under the promised Messiah was the immediate and great object of prayer to the Old Testament saints. When the Messiah appeared, and began to erect his gospel kingdom, the immediate object of the petitions before us, as presented to, and used by, his primitive disciples, was the extension of this new dispensation from Judea throughout the world. We, in this later period of the world, being presented by the word and providence of God, with the near prospect of a still more glorious dispensation of grace, in a far more general

diffusion than has yet existed, of the Christian doctrine and spirit; *we* are hereby directed to apply the petitions before us more immediately to this approaching event: while those, who shall enjoy this expected, happy dispensation, will still long and pray for the more illustrious and final coming of Christ in his kingdom of glory.

Having briefly illustrated the prayer of our text, let us attend more distinctly to its superior *importance*; or to the sacred motives and obligations, which persuade us to adopt it.

In the first place, the rank which it bears in this divine pattern of devotion proclaims its peculiar moment. The interest and honour of God's name and kingdom are justly held up as the beginning, centre, and end of the Lord's prayer, both because the perfections and glory of the Supreme Being deservedly claim our first and supreme attention; and because true love to him, which is the soul of religion and of acceptable prayer, unites the heart to his interest, as its principal object; and of course makes it desire above all things the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom.

The scripture represents the work of redemption, as the greatest of divine operations, and as giving the most perfect display of the divine character, as reflecting transcendent glory on all the persons and perfections of Deity. Consequently, the more this work flourishes, or the more eminently the kingdom of grace prevails, the more splendid is the triumph of the divine name; the larger is the revenue of glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Must not every soul, which possesses the genuine feelings of piety, be instantly warmed by this consideration into ardent prayers and efforts for the advancement of Christ's kingdom? The prophet Isaiah, having a distant glimpse of the surprising glory, which

would redound to the blessed God by the redemption of man, is so enraptured by it, that he fervently calls even upon inanimate nature, to burst forth into joyful praise on the great occasion—"Sing, oh heavens, for the Lord hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, oh forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and *glorified himself* in Israel."

How peculiarly incumbent, then, is it upon *us*, who are at once God's rational creatures, and the special objects of his glorious redeeming mercy, to begin and end all our offices of devotion, with fervent praises for the work of redemption, and with earnest prayers for its promised, more extensive success! How important is it, that this object should pervade and sanctify the whole contexture of our devotions on every occasion, especially such as the present! Otherwise, our religious addresses will proceed on a wrong principle, and breathe an improper and selfish spirit.

The reason of things as well, as the arrangement of the Lord's prayer, instructs us to ask for other blessings chiefly as means to this governing end; to ask our daily bread, or needed external good, not merely as an instrument of animal, much less of sinful gratification; but as requisite or conducive to our serving the purposes of his kingdom; yea, to beg the forgiveness of our sins, and deliverance from temptation and all evil, not barely for selfish ends, but that God's honour and kingdom may be promoted by our pardon, sanctification, and final happiness, and by our correspondent, everlasting returns of service and praise.

In a word, the petitions in the text are of such primary importance, that they ought both to consecrate and limit all our other desires; so that we should feel will-

ing to be denied in the latter so far, as they happen to interfere with the former. Those petitions, indeed, the grant of which is essential to our final happiness, are always consistent, yea, inseparably united, with the glory of God and the interest of the Redeemer; so, that in properly seeking the one, we necessarily seek and secure the other. But those requests, which respect temporal good, or some non-essential circumstances of spiritual blessings, may not be always consistent with the grand object of prayer in the text; in which case, they must be cheerfully submitted and sacrificed to it. In this case, the denial of our private inferior petitions is, on the whole, the best fulfilment and reward of our prayer; because it gratifies and recompenses our first, disinterested, and crowning request.

Our Saviour prayed earnestly, that the bitter cup of crucifixion might pass from him, yet with perfect submission to the will and glory of his Father. His particular request was refused; because the honour of God's decrees, predictions, and attributes in the redemption of man, demanded his death. Yet we are told, in the fifth chapter to the Hebrews, that "he was heard in these his strong supplications and tears;" that is, his governing desire was granted. His Father, by quickly exalting him from the grave to his own right hand, and giving him to see of the travail of his soul to his abundant satisfaction, rewarded him with a far greater good, than that which he had previously denied.

Which leads us to observe, that the proper recompense and joy of the Redeemer are greatly concerned in the petitions before us. The heart of Christ was so perfectly engaged for his Father's honour and kingdom, as connected with our redemption, that he freely submitted to immense humiliation and sufferings to secure

these invaluable ends. This was, in a great degree, the joy set before him, for which he endured the cross, and despised the shame. A leading promise made to him by his Father was, that he should see his seed, and that the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand; that all nations should serve him; that every knee and tongue should pay him homage. When we consider how richly Christ has merited this promised reward; how much he laboured, prayed, and suffered in order to obtain it; what an eminent claim HE had to be exalted both by God and man, who has done and indured so much for the interests of both: when we contemplate these things, can we avoid feeling the strongest incentives to pray for that, which is the favourite object, recompense, and harvest of all his toils and sufferings!

Especially when we add, that the advancement of Christ's kingdom is an event unspeakably glorious and happy. It is *glorious;* as the character and government of this divine King are absolutely perfect. While the dominion of the greatest and best earthly rulers is weak, and mutable, and transitory, liable to be obstructed and even subverted, by domestic or foreign resistance; the empire of the Son of God is, like himself, immoveable and everlasting. While the authority of earthly kings can regulate only the visible conduct, and secure the temporal interests, of their subjects; the administration of King Jesus controls the secret affections, and insures the spiritual and everlasting felicity of the soul. While many imperfections mark the intellectual and moral character, and consequently the official conduct, of the best human governors, and of course render their administration a feeble, precarious, and interrupted source of public happiness; the character of

Messiah, the Prince, combines unerring wisdom to plan, almighty power to execute, invariable justice, benevolence, and mercy to prompt and direct all his knowledge and energy to the highest good of his subjects.

How transcendent must be the prosperity of that holy community, which obeys the laws, and enjoys the protection, of this glorious Sovereign! What a golden age of the world must that be, in which his benign government shall immediately embrace the whole brotherhood of man! Figure to yourselves, my hearers, the divine religion of Jesus enthroned in the hearts, in the families, and in all the societies of mankind! What an aggregate of private and public happiness is the immediate result! Behold each individual emancipated from the vile and destructive tyranny of sin and Satan, and restored to inward freedom, purity, and joy! See every family possessing that domestic harmony and bliss, which flows from mutual love and fidelity among its several members, and from the constant, delightful experience of the divine benediction upon their common cares, endearments, and satisfactions! Behold every civil society enjoying that public liberty and defence, prosperity and greatness, internal and external peace, which naturally arise from the universal prevalence of private and social virtue among its various members and rulers! See the benevolent principles of Christianity cementing them all into one harmonious body, and devoting their several functions, their united affections and efforts to the general welfare! See each member loving his neighbour as himself, cheerfully losing private interest in the public good, steadily practising those personal, patriotic, and divine virtues, which nourish and perfect human society, and at once zealously promoting, and delightfully

enjoying, the virtuous and happy state of every fellow member, and of the community at large!

As these would be the natural fruits of the gospel spirit universally prevailing; so Christ himself would then be the king and protector of our world in a peculiar and eminent manner. All his high attributes and authority would be exerted for its temporal and spiritual welfare. All the nations would enjoy the direct influences of his wise, efficacious, and benevolent administration, and be moulded by it into one vast empire of righteousness and joy. Who, that has any friendship either to God or man, can help exulting at the thought of so glorious and happy a scene, and contributing his best wishes and prayers for its speedy arrival!

Especially when we consider further, how frequently and expressly the scriptures predict and promise such a blessed period, as we have just described. The Bible often speaks of a time, when the heathen and uttermost parts of the earth shall be given to Christ; when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea; when the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, and all Israel be saved; when antichrist shall be destroyed, and Satan bound a thousand years; when war shall universally cease, and piety, peace, and happiness abound through the world! There is no period in the history of past ages, which corresponds with these magnificent, scriptural prophecies. We are, therefore, warranted and encouraged to expect and pray for their future accomplishment, and we ought to pray for it with that assurance of faith, which such express divine declarations require, and with that ardour and constancy, which their excellent and happy import demands.

It is also further to be considered, that the whole creation is earnestly waiting, and constantly groaning and travailing in pain for this glorious event. The apostle, in the eighth chapter to the Romans, introduces the whole frame of visible nature, the insensible and brutal as well, as intelligent creation, as vehemently desiring, expecting, yea, travailing in pain for this happy period. The general sentiment of this remarkable passage seems to be this; that man's apostasy has brought such vanity, disorder, and bondage upon the creation around him; has subjected them to such an unnatural and miserable state from the abuse of man and the curse of God, that they may be said to groan under the weight of this servitude, and to pant for liberty; to groan after a restoration to their primitive perfection and use. This passage further intimates, that when the kingdom of Christ shall come in its glory, all nature shall, in some sense, participate its happy fruits; all the animal and material creation shall, in a great measure, be rescued from the effects of the curse, and be made to serve the real benefit of man, and the honour of their God. As the prophet represents it, "holiness to the Lord shall be written upon the very bells of the horses, and every pot in Jerusalem shall be holiness to the Lord of hosts." Shall not *we* then, whose apostasy has contributed to this debasement and misery of nature, join the general groan and cry of the travailing creation, in ardently praying for its expected, happy deliverance; when not only man, but the creatures connected with him, shall, in some important sense, be regenerated from the bondage of corruption unto the glorious liberty of the sons of God?

We may add, that fervent and constant prayer for the coming of Christ's kingdom is one of the best proofs

of a truly enlarged and benevolent mind, of a spiritual and divine temper. It is represented in scripture, as the peculiar character of the saint, that he is a friend to Zion; that he loves, waits, and prays for her prosperity; that he takes pleasure in the very stones of Jerusalem, and favours even the dust thereof. Whence it appears, that a spirit of prayer for the advancement of the Christian interest is necessary to prove our own Christianity. Without it we have no scriptural evidence, that we have any true love to Christ, to his church, or to the human race. But affectionate and unceasing supplication for the general spread and success of the gospel at once discovers and improves a spirit of friendship to God and the Redeemer, to the Christian religion and church, to the best interests of mankind, and in some sense to the perfection and felicity of the moral system in general. For the scriptures lead us to think, that the knowledge, virtue, and happiness of the various orders of the angelic world, are greatly promoted by the display of divine glory in the design and gradual progress of man's restoration to holiness and happiness. In praying, therefore, for this object, we virtually intercede for the universe; we concur and have fellowship with the infinitely benevolent Deity in that, which is his favourite design; and thus we approve ourselves his genuine children.

In short, fervent prayer for the advancement of Christ's kingdom is an exercise equally noble, pleasant, and advantageous. It is *noble*, as it implies the most generous, godlike views and desires. It is *pleasant*, as it expresses and promotes that love to God and his creatures, which is the very temper of happiness; and, as it is attended with a delightful consciousness of resembling and pleasing the Being, whom we address,

and with a comforting assurance, that our pious and benevolent petitions will be ultimately answered. It is *advantageous*, as it directly sweetens and exalts our spirits; as it engages us to such a conduct, or to the careful use of such means, as may best correspond with our prayers, and give them the greatest force and success; and, as it is connected, by divine constitution, with the attainment of the important blessing we implore.

As prayer, in general, when rightly performed, eminently qualifies dependent creatures for the reception of divine favours, and is therefore properly made the condition of their bestowment; so, intercession for our fellow-creatures, especially for the revival and prevalence of religion among them, is, with great reason, prescribed as a mean of drawing down this infinite blessing. For since earnest prayer for this object implies and promotes a disposition, and pursues an end, highly acceptable and honorary to God, and eminently conducive to the general good; the Supreme Being must surely be disposed to encourage and reward such intercession, by granting some signal tokens of his approbation. Accordingly, the Bible abounds with precepts and examples, encouragements and promises, intended to animate Christians to frequent and earnest supplication for this comprehensive mercy. The Lord's prayer, as we have already shewn, is a standing prescription to this effect. When God, by his prophet Ezekiel, had promised his people a rich aggregate of temporal and spiritual blessings, he adds, that he would be inquired of by the house of Israel to do this for them. In another passage he represents himself, as waiting for his people's prayers, to prepare the way for the bestowment of special favours on his church. Yea, he describes himself, as hastening to confer these blessings, while they are only beginning to

call upon him; and to crown the whole, he speaks of himself, as being at their command, with regard to mercies of this nature. Agreeably, the remarkable efficacy of this species of prayer is exemplified by many passages, both in sacred and ecclesiastical history, and by some memorable events in the annals of our country.

These motives to prayer for the revival and spread of religion, are greatly enforced by the complexion of the world at the present day, and the wonderful dispensations of providence, which are passing over it. Many causes and events are now signally conspiring to prepare mankind for such a new and glorious state of things, as the Bible predicts.

In this view, we might particularly mention the rapid destruction of the papal hierarchy; the hastening and general downfal of religious fraud and tyranny, superstition and bigotry; the swift progress of knowledge and free inquiry, of mutual candour and catholicism among the different Christian denominations; the unrivalled extension and efficacy, which are given to the means of early education; the accelerated improvements of mankind in the science of civil government and liberty; and in the various arts, which adorn and meliorate human society.

At the same time, these scientific, political, and religious advantages, are found, by experiment, utterly insufficient to reform the moral character of the age. Instead of this, they are, in many instances, giving birth and nourishment to greater errors and vices, both in the religious and political world, than perhaps ever before disgraced the history of man. All which is evidently adapted to convince mankind, by their own experience, of the inefficacy of boasted human reason and virtue, and the absolute necessity of that extraordinary divine influence,

which the scriptures predict, to give due force and direction to the best external means of reformation and happiness.

As the Holy Spirit, in his sanctifying operations, is the great summary blessing purchased and promised by the Founder of our religion; and as the general diffusion of this blessing is frequently represented in scripture, as the main source and ingredient of the glory and felicity of the latter days, and of course the leading object of Christian intercession; so the progress of things in the world, at this day, must impress serious observers with the special importance and duty of earnestly praying for this favour, in such a pressing crisis of human affairs.

The professed friends of Christianity are now loudly called, by the voice of providence, to distinguish themselves in this way from the numerous tribe of speculative and practical infidels. While this careless or scoffing description of men deride either the whole doctrine of a future more glorious state of the Christian church, or at least of a special divine agency in producing it; while they fondly ascribe the expected regeneration of the world to a train of common, natural causes, and ridicule the pretended propriety and utility of prayer, as a preparatory mean of effecting it; let us, both by avowed sentiment and practice, steadily hold forth the opposite truths. Let us openly testify to the world, that in our view it is both philosophical and scriptural for dependent and degenerate creatures solemnly and unitedly to own their dependence and degeneracy, and the all-sufficient power and grace of their Creator, by imploring this needed and promised influence, both for themselves and their

fellow-men. Let us endeavour to convince all around us, that there is no more superstition or enthusiasm in resorting to prayer, as a medium of spiritual blessings, than in using proper means in other cases to obtain valuable ends.

To impress this conviction more strongly as well, as to give life and success to our prayers, let us follow them with a suitable practice. Let none of us take refuge in this concert of prayer, as a cloak, or compensation, for allowed hypocrisy or disobedience, or a substitute for personal reformation and holiness. Let us prove, that we are sincere in lamenting the infidelity and vices of the day, and in praying for a general reformation, by bewailing and correcting, in the first place, our own remaining infidelity and transgressions; and by studiously exhibiting, in our daily temper and conduct, that Christian piety and morality, which our prayers seem to befriend and promote. Let us esteem this, as among the greatest advantages of this visible agreement in prayer, that it not only gives new animation and force to the petitions of those, who engage in it, and renders their united supplications peculiarly pleasing and prevalent with the Most High; that it not only greatly improves the Christian union and candour of those various denominations, whom it embraces; but also binds them all to exemplary prudence and godliness in their daily deportment, and urges them to the most discreet, yet vigorous measures, to advance the kingdom of Christ in the rising and risen generations around them; particularly in the respective families, churches, and neighbourhoods, with which they are severally connected. It is the speaker's ardent wish and prayer, that these happy fruits may conspicuously mark that seasonable and laud-

able concert of devotion, which has once more brought us together; and that the result of all may be, a remarkable fulfilment of ancient prophecies in the extension of primitive Christianity in all its transcendent virtues and blessings. In the enlivening hope of so happy an issue, "Ye, that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give him no rest, till he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

# Sermon XX.

## The Spirit, Employment, and Design of the Christian Ministry.*

EPHESIANS iii. 8, 9, 10.

*Unto* me, *who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent, that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.*

PERHAPS no passage of scripture gives a more amiable and exalted view of the spirit, employment, and design of the Christian ministry, than the words just recited. The humble and grateful spirit of a good minister is forcibly expressed in this remarkable clause: "To *me*, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given." His employment is summed up in preaching "the unsearchable riches of Christ." The design of his office is to hold up, not only to men on earth, but "to principalities and powers in heavenly places" the manifold display of Deity in the work of redemption.

* Delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. W. E. Channing, in Boston, June 1st, 1803.

We will attend, in the FIRST place, to the lowly and thankful spirit, which becomes the gospel minister. This temper is peculiarly required and promoted by the Christian revelation, by the leading complexion of its facts and doctrines, of its precepts and blessings. It ever accompanies and distinguishes evangelical piety and virtue from their first rise in the human heart to their final perfection and reward. As Christianity is the religion of sinners, so a cordial reception of it must presuppose and powerfully cherish a humbling sense of personal guilt and depravity, and a disposition to ascribe the needed blessings of pardon, holiness, and eternal life, to the infinite mercy of God, operating through the perfect atonement of his Son. Accordingly, the habitual views and exercises of every real Christian harmonize with the prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" with the acknowledgment of our apostle, "by the grace of God I am, what I am;" and with the song of the heavenly hosts: "Salvation to our God, who sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb."

As the spirit, expressed in the text, characterizes every penitent believer, so it eminently suits the profession of a Christian minister. His official studies and religious addresses constantly place before him the awful presence and majesty, the infinite holiness and grace of God, the wonderful condescension and sacrifice of Christ, the dependent and wretched condition of apostate man, the duty and importance of humble repentance and thankful praise on the part of redeemed sinners, and his own peculiar obligations to divine mercy for making him not only a partaker, but a public herald of the gospel salvation. Can we wonder, that these combined ideas roused in the bosom of Paul the most humble and grateful emotions? Ought they not to pro-

duce similar effects on every minister? Can a man, who is a stranger to these sentiments and affections, be qualified to enforce them on others? Can he skilfully and tenderly administer that spiritual medicine, the necessity and value of which he does not perceive, whose healing and comforting efficacy he has never felt? Can he suitably lead the devotions of Christians, who has never imbibed the gospel spirit; whose heart has never been tuned to the harmony of Christian love and praise? In short, the soul of a minister must be cast in the humble mould of Christianity, before he can relish and faithfully perform the condescending and self-denying duties of his office; before he can readily become all things to all men, and even take pleasure in instructing, reproving, or comforting the weakest and lowest forms of human nature. On the altar of Christian humility he must sacrifice that fondness for human applause, mental luxury, or worldly emolument; that pride of literary, ministerial, or moral eminence; that unfeeling or haughty neglect of the common people, which superior station, knowledge, and fame, assisted by human frailty or corruption, are apt to inspire. To subdue these evils, and to nourish the opposite virtues, the Christian pastor must early and deeply imbibe the self-abasing, yet ennobling views presented in our text.

We grant, that Paul had special reasons for adopting the humble and admiring language before us. He had been a violent persecutor and blasphemer of Christ and his gospel. The sovereign power and mercy of the Redeemer had suddenly arrested his mad career, and conferred on him, not only the temper and blessedness of a Christian believer, but the high character of a Christian apostle. He had been furnished for this office, had been supported and prospered in its execution, in a

manner truly extraordinary, and probably unexampled even in that age of miracles. The affecting contrast between his former and present condition perpetually dwelt on his mind. It sunk him in his own estimation below the least of saints, while it raised him above the highest in his fervent and exalted ascriptions to the grace of God.

But while the circumstances and feelings of Paul were in some respects peculiar; we must remark, that the spirit of the sincere Christian and minister is essentially the same in all, who possess it. The most amiable temper, the best education, the most improved intellect, and the greatest exterior decorum and virtue, cannot raise their subjects above the necessity and obligation of evangelical faith and repentance. And whoever cordially repents of sin, and embraces the gospel, will readily unite with our apostle in esteeming himself less than the least of all saints, and in ascribing all his privileges and hopes to the riches of divine mercy. It may reasonably be expected, that these humble and grateful emotions will keep pace with his general progress in religious knowledge and virtue, comfort and usefulness; because his materials for and incitements to them will increase in this proportion. Real, and especially advanced Christians are far more intimately acquainted with themselves, than they can be with any of their brethren. Their spiritual senses are particularly nice and tender in discerning and feeling their own defects and transgressions. Their charity suggests in behalf of the offences of others many excuses and extenuations, which a stricter knowledge or jealousy of their own characters dares not apply to themselves. Hence those professors and ministers of the gospel, who are truly eminent in their profession, are generally distinguished by a modest and charitable deportment.

We may add, the good minister is nourished in humility and pious gratitude, by contemplating his honourable, sacred, and arduous employment. He compares his own weakness, impurity, and demerit, with the high nature and demands of his station. And while this comparison fills him with ingenuous shame and trembling solicitude; it awakens thankful astonishment, that God should advance so mean a creature to an office so dignified; that he should select and assist so feeble an instrument to accomplish a work so difficult and glorious. This brings us

Secondly, To consider the *employment* of a Christian minister. It is here expressed by "preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ."

These "unsearchable riches" may denote the personal excellencies of the Redeemer. Thus understood, they point us to the wonderful assemblage of divine and human perfections in that mysterious Person, whose name is Immanuel, who is the image and effulgence of his Father's glory, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead, to whom the titles and attributes, the works and honours of divinity are ascribed; who yet was made flesh and tabernacled among us; who, amid the natural infirmities and temptations, exhibited all the virtues of humanity, in their full and steady lustre. What treasures of majesty and meekness, of dignity and condescension, of glory and humility, of justice and mercy, are united in his character! In his person and actions, combined with his discourses, the invisible God is brought down to man, that man might rise to the true knowledge, imitation, and enjoyment of God.

The "riches of Christ" may also include his mediatorial character and fulness; his great offices and works, as the Instructor and High Priest, the Ruler and Judge

of the world. His instructions, as recorded in the sacred history, were admirably recommended by their simplicity and authority, by their harmony and variety, by their fulness and grandeur. They set before us the most interesting and sublime objects, in their native majesty, and in the most familiar light. They give us the most needful and satisfactory information with respect both to God and ourselves. They contain nothing, which is merely curious, puzzling, or dry; nothing, which savours of superstition, or fanaticism, of learned subtlety, or worldly policy. The truths, which they unfold, oblige and animate believers to universal holiness. The morality, which they inculcate, while it immediately grows out of these truths, embraces the widest range, the noblest principles and offices of virtue. In short, the doctrine of this divine teacher, duly entertained, enriches both the understanding and heart; it exalts them into a happy correspondence with the great objects presented. "Beholding in" this "glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory." While the instructions of Christ thus enlighten and purify, his atonement brings us pardon and comfort. To a creature burdened with conscious guilt, and acquainted with the perfect character and law of his Maker, how congenial, how welcome is the Christian scheme of mediation! How consoling to hear, that the Son of God has become the High Priest of offending man; that, by his obedience unto death, he has completely vindicated and honoured the divine government, and procured the full and everlasting forgiveness of every penitent sinner? It is the part of the evangelical preacher to state this doctrine in its most simple and practical form; to point out its importance in the system of revelation, its correspondence with the present

situation of man, with the general course of providence, and with the essential attributes of God. It becomes him to show how admirably this expedient unites the pardon of relenting guilt, and the reward of defective virtue, with the public condemnation of sin, the improved order of the universe, and the most pure and exalted display of divine glory. It becomes him to defend this doctrine from every imputation of absurdity, of injustice, or cruelty, by showing, that the Father appointed, and the Son consented, to the death of the cross, from motives of the most tender, wise, and comprehensive love; that the good resulting from it will be unbounded and eternal; and that the pardon of offenders through this medium displays the divine benevolence in a manner, far more extraordinary, multiplied, and impressive, than if God had cancelled our guilt by one single and sovereign act of grace. The faithful instructer will also hold up the intercession of Christ in its scriptural import and beauty. He will show, that the constant and successful agency of this illustrious advocate in behalf of offending man greatly exalts both the Father and Son; while it effectually humbles and encourages believers in their sincere, though imperfect acts of worship and obedience. With what boldness may we draw near to the Holy of Holies, when we see our persons represented, and our interests espoused by this great High Priest! With what humility, repentance, and awe, are we inspired, when we find, that no less a person than the Son of God, can give us access to the presence of infinite purity!

This leads us to observe, that the riches of Christ in his sacerdotal office, are intimately connected with his regal authority. His mediation was designed, not to countenance, but to condemn and extinguish our re-

bellion against the divine government. It was intended not to cancel, but to multiply and enforce our moral obligations; to give them a commanding influence on our tempers and lives. To accomplish this purpose, and to reward our Redeemer for his meritorious humiliation, the Father has invested him with "all power in heaven and earth," and in particular has made him "Head over all things to the church." This mediatorial King has given his subjects a perfect constitution of government to direct their faith, to animate their obedience, and to ensure their felicity. He has appointed officers to interpret and enforce this constitution. He administers all the affairs of providence for the good of his spiritual empire. He sends forth his Spirit to give due effect to this mighty apparatus, and to render it "the power of God to salvation." How pleasing to remark, that, while the law of Christ, in its doctrines, prescriptions, and motives, is wonderfully fitted to destroy the power of sin, and establish the interest of holiness, this provision is made successful by an inward and divine operation, which begins and matures in our hearts the temper and happiness of the sons of God! How comforting the assurance, that the gospel, like a sacred leaven, shall gradually pervade and assimilate the whole lump of mankind, till all the kingdoms of the world are become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ! When his church is thus completed, this mediatorial Sovereign will assume the character of a Judge. He will display his divine power, discernment, and justice, in raising the dead, in convening them before his tribunal, in unfolding to public view the moral character of each, in pronouncing and executing the final sentence, which dooms his enemies to hopeless punishment, and instates his friends in the happiness and glo-

ry of his eternal kingdom. My brethren, what unsearchable riches of knowledge and goodness, of merit and faithfulness, of divine energy and perseverance, are exhibited by our Redeemer, in discharging these high employments? How immense the blessings, which result from their execution!

Which brings us to add, that "the riches of Christ" refer to the benefits, which his mediation has procured, and his gospel confers. These benefits include, not only the complete remission of past offences, but the recovered image and friendly intercourse of our Creator, with the animating hope, and ultimate possession, of a blessed immortality. They also comprise those outward ordinances, which sensibly ratify these invisible blessings; which assist our contemplation, pursuit, and enjoyment of them; and engage us to corresponding affections and duties. They comprehend the just and merciful conditions, to which the gospel salvation is annexed; together with the offer and conveyance of that divine influence, which enables us to perform them. These conditions may be summed up in evangelical faith, with its genuine fruits. The requirement of this cordial and practical belief is not a capricious or arbitrary demand, but a proper, needful, and gracious prescription. For this faith yields due honour both to God and the Mediator. It freely submits to the divine government and mercy. It gives the saving truth an operative existence in our minds; and thus imparts to us its holy and happy effects. But unbelief, either in speculation, temper, or practice, implicitly denies both the Father and the Son. It spurns the only remedy, which can give health and peace to the distempered soul. Of course, it necessarily confirms the moral sickness and death of the patient. In

this view, the threatening of destruction, which the gospel denounces upon infidels, is a rich display of wisdom, equity, and kindness. It is wise and just, as it arms this divine religion with sanctions equal to its importance. It is kind, as it seasonably warns offenders of their danger, and compels them by the great law of self preservation to escape from impending ruin, and to lay hold on eternal life.

We have enumerated the leading topics of evangelical instruction, as denoted by the "unsearchable riches of Christ;" and it may be useful to add, that the original word here rendered *preach*, literally intends to *evangelize*, or to publish a joyful message. The connexion further implies, that, to answer this description, our preaching, or publication, must mainly centre in Christ and his redemption. As Jesus Christ is declared to be "the chief corner stone" of the spiritual fabric, which was reared by the prophets and apostles; so their humble successors in these last days must build on the same foundation. When the Christian preacher discourses on natural religion and morality, he should represent them paying homage to Jesus, as their great Restorer and Exemplar, and binding their votaries to a new set of moral duties, created by the new discoveries of the gospel. If he treat of the ancient dispensations of providence and of religion, and in particular of the laws and predictions delivered to the Hebrews; he should hold up these as either prefiguring or gradually introducing the PROMISED SEED, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. If he inculcate Christian duties, he should enforce them chiefly by evangelical motives. Would he rouse the secure? Let him urge not only the purity and the curse of the divine law, but the awful display of human guilt and infinite justice in the

death of Christ, and the aggravated doom incurred by those, who neglect this great salvation. Would he guide and encourage the anxious and desponding soul? Let him hold up the riches of the Saviour, and invite the poor, heavy laden sinner to come for divine treasures, for spiritual and eternal rest. Would he comfort and invigorate the Christian? Let him bring up to view the peculiar aids, supports, and rewards, insured to him by the FAITHFUL AND TRUE WITNESS. In short, the gospel is an unbounded treasury, from which the wise and good steward may dispense portions suitable to all the varieties, and equal to all the wants of reasonable, lapsed, immortal beings. The riches here deposited are indeed unsearchable. Their worth cannot be estimated. Their amount exceeds calculation. As they could not be discovered by human reason, and were but faintly revealed under the Jewish economy; so they cannot be fully comprehended by the most illuminated Christian, nor even by the highest angel. This train of thought brings us, in the

Third place, To the DESIGN of the gospel ministry. This design respects the inhabitants both of earth and of heaven.

I. The immediate object of Christian preaching is the instruction of *mankind*, or, in the language of the text, "to make all *men* see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God." The gospel is here styled a "mystery" or *secret*, because in the early ages it "was hid in God;" that is, it was either wholly concealed in the divine breast, or imparted only to a few, or couched in dark predictions and types. The ancient church received such hints of this merciful plan, as suited her infant state, and the wise preparatory discipline under which she was

placed. The great body even of pious Hebrews had faint, and, in some respects, erroneous views, both of the nature and designed extent of the Messiah's kingdom. The equal participation of uncircumcised Gentiles with Jews, in the blessings of this kingdom, was a secret, not only foreign, but hostile to the favourite ideas and expectations of the latter. When this mystery was fully disclosed, it filled the apostles with wonder, their Hebrew converts with regret, and the Jewish unbelievers with rage. Hence Paul, who was eminently the minister of Christ to the Gentile world, insists much on this generous, yet surprising and offensive topic. His liberal mind exults in a mission, intended to abolish religious distinctions, and to unite all nations into one affectionate and happy fraternity. He dwells with rapture on the grand idea of bringing *all men* into "the fellowship" of the gospel, or into a holy communion with each other under Jesus their common head. This sublime purpose and effect of Christianity he infers from this fact, that "God created all things by Jesus Christ." As if he should say, It is reasonable to expect, that the common Creator of Jews and heathens will be their impartial and benevolent Saviour.

Agreeably, the merciful promises, given to Adam and Noah, were made to the whole human family. The divine covenant with Abraham ensured spiritual blessings to all nations. The selection of the Hebrews, as the peculiar people of Jehovah, was a needful and catholic provision for the highest good of the world. It rendered that nation the public keepers, witnesses, and propagators of religious truth, both natural and revealed. It made them instruments of preparing mankind for a perfect and universal religion. It still renders them authentic vouchers to Christianity, and will hereafter sig-

nally contribute to its intended establishment and influence throughout the globe.

To carry this grand device into gradual execution, is the appropriate business of public Christian instructors. They are to expound, confirm, and apply that great "mystery," which was early conceived and wrapped up in the purpose of God, but which the Son of his bosom has fully declared. They should unfold this ancient and divine secret in terms so plain, that *all* men, even the lowest, may see it, or obtain such knowledge of it as may guide and mould their affections and practice. They should guard against that intellectual vanity or refinement, which would destroy the simplicity, the majesty, and force of sacred truth, by artificial ornament, or abstruse speculation. They should aim, like our apostle, not so much to please the elegant, the metaphysical, or the scientific few, as to impart saving instruction to all. To accomplish this effect, to convey the doctrines of salvation into every understanding and heart, the preacher must unite perspicuity and energy. A mind richly stored with evangelical knowledge and goodness, must infuse light and warmth into his discourses; while his corresponding example must render them doubly luminous and impressive. As the gospel is intended to unite all men in holy "fellowship," its ministers should adjust their preaching and conduct to this design. They should point the attention of their hearers to those great truths and duties, which form the centre of Christian union. A zealous and joint attachment to these should temper or extinguish that fire of controversy, which divided sentiments and jealous feelings about small or doubtful matters have so often inflamed. It ill becomes the ministers of Christ to rend asunder his mystical body, by substituting the narrow

zeal of a party, in the room of that comprehensive spirit, which unites men to God, and to one another. It ill becomes them to contend, even for essential truth, in a manner unfavourable to Christian love, and its practical fruits; for such contention injures both the credit and moral influence of truth: it disfigures and endangers the gospel church, even by those very doctrines, which, rightly entertained, constitute her principal strength and beauty. It is by "speaking the truth in love," and by carrying it out into a holy temper and practice, that Christians are to grow up into one compact, flourishing, and glorious community.

Let us, then, to whom the dispensation of the gospel is committed, strive, by our doctrine and spirit, by our united exertions and prayers, to make it productive of these blessed effects. As stars in the firmament of Zion, let us diffuse the light of evangelical truth, not only to the best advantage, but to the widest extent. Let our fervent intercessions and labours never rest, "till *all men*," even the remotest climes, are brought into the Christian "fellowship;" till the whole earth is filled with divine glory and human bliss. Nay, more; let our benevolent views expand even beyond the limits of our species and world. For,

II. The Christian religion and ministry were designed for the benefit of "principalities and powers in heavenly places." The gospel church and its sacred institutions are mirrors, which exhibit to superior intelligences, "the manifold wisdom of God." That man is but a link in one mighty chain of being; that there is a connexion or mutual subserviency between him and higher orders of creatures, analogous to the union, which pervades the visible system, is a sentiment congruous to reason, and established by revelation. Both the Old and

New Testament introduce various ranks and countless multitudes of celestial spirits, as deeply concerned in the affairs of our world, especially those, which relate to the church. By this intercourse they at once greatly contribute to the common good, and receive vast additions of personal happiness. While their benevolent agency in the Messiah's kingdom is an immediate source of sublime and increasing delight; it is attended with new, progressive and beatific discoveries of the divine glory. To search out, to adore, and to enjoy the perfections of God in his works, is their unceasing employment and felicity. The redemption of man, in all its connexions, at once exceeds, illustrates, and unites in one perfect whole, the preceding and concurrent operations of Deity. It gives to admiring angels an exhibition of his character, more diversified, harmonious, and complete, than the volumes of nature and providence had ever suggested. With what high improvement and satisfaction must superior beings behold and enjoy this manifestation! The "manifold wisdom," presented in it, must eminently seize their attention, enlarge their knowledge, and exalt their devotion. How wonderful must appear that contrivance, which renders this little globe so important to the beauty, variety, and happiness of the universe; which forces even human rebellion and ruin to swell the triumph of order, rectitude, and bliss! How comprehensive that wisdom, which has erected so many different theatres for the display of divine glory; which has adopted one form of administration for the sinless natives of heaven, another for its apostate citizens, a third for disobedient man; and which has so combined these diversities, as to make them jointly conduce to ultimate and general good! How profound that intelligence, which, by subjecting the Lord of angels to abasement and

death, not for their guilty brethren, but for a lower order of sinners, is effectually repairing the loss of the former, by the restored virtue and felicity of the latter; and which, by this expedient, has provided for the incorporation of redeemed men and angelic beings in one confirmed and glorious community!

It is important to add, that these heavenly spirits derive their knowledge of this "manifold wisdom" chiefly from the gospel dispensation. It was, in a great degree, veiled even from them, till it was revealed to the apostles, and by their preaching imparted to the world. These invisible ministers of Christ and his church gained a clear insight into this mystery, by witnessing his life and death, his resurrection and ascension; by seeing ancient types and prophecies fulfilled and illuminated by these events; by hearing the import of these facts explained by authorized Christian teachers; and by observing their transcendent and divine effects on the human character and condition. These sources of information reflected new lustre on the several dispensations of God to mankind. They exhibited the whole train of divine conduct from Adam to Christ, as one harmonious, yet diversified system, leading by the nicest and surest steps to a glorious consummation. While they elucidated the manifold wisdom of God in his former proceedings, they especially unfolded his deep and benevolent design in so long deferring a clear and general discovery of his mercy. Wise and good spirits, both on earth and in heaven, now see with delight the beauty of this arrangement. They see, that in this way the world was trained up by gentle degrees for this sublime revelation; that it receives solemn attestation and dignity from a long and vast apparatus, going before and terminating in it; that a full experiment had been made of

human philosophy and government, of natural theology and virtue; that Christ did not appear till the pure religion and morals, taught in the first ages, were lost beyond hope of recovery; nor, until the union, peace, and learning of the world had opened a door for the easy and general diffusion of his gospel; in short, that he came at the precise period, when the political, moral, and religious state of the globe invited, yea, cried aloud for a gracious, supernatural, and universal dispensation. They also behold this merciful religion wisely adapted to all the exigences of those to whom it is offered. Fired with these discoveries, the holy and benevolent angels fervently sing, in concert with the redeemed, the new song of the Lamb; "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Yea, so immense is the sum of glory to God, and of happiness to the moral creation, arising from the work and the knowledge of human redemption, that every creature in the universe is introduced, as joining the concert of praise, and saying, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto him, that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever."

Our subject in review furnishes a satisfactory reply to a frequent suggestion either of humble diffidence, or of cavilling infidelity. The lowly and fearful mind is sometimes ready to view the gospel as incredible, because it unfolds riches of condescending love so great and wonderful, as to confound rather than encourage belief, especially when contrasted with the mean and ill-deserving character of their object. The sceptical philosopher is likewise apt to view it, as a strong objection to Christianity, that it exhibits the Deity lavishing his best treasures on our inconsiderable world, which is

but an atom in the intelligent universe. These difficulties are easily removed, by observing, that if it was not below the dignity of God to create all things by Jesus Christ, it is still less below him to redeem many millions of his rational creatures by the same glorious Person, and thus to recover them to that moral perfection, in which his own dignity and happiness consist. Man, though comparatively mean, rises to inconceivable importance, when viewed in his relations to the universe and eternity. As he possesses a soul capable of endless advances in knowledge, usefulness, and bliss; so his connexions with other beings, according to scripture and rational probability, render the scheme of his recovery a source of unbounded improvement and joy. What though the immediate scene and objects of this redemption be low and obscure? This circumstance only heightens the splendour of redeeming power and wisdom, condescension and grace; just as the poverty and weakness of the Saviour and his early disciples gave new evidence and glory to his religion. Was it not highly worthy of the Supreme Ruler, not only to reclaim an apostate world, but to reunite it to his holy empire, and to render this union a mean of eternal praise to himself, and good to the universe? Thus, sound philosophy, by enlarging in our minds the intellectual creation, enhances the importance, and of course the credibility of the Christian redemption.

While these great ideas dispel the mists of unbelieving doubt and sophistry, they furnish gospel ministers with the noblest incitements to zeal and magnanimity. What though their office be despised, and their message opposed, by the secret or open enemies of that God, whose government and mercy they recommend, and of that Saviour, whose unsearchable riches they

preach? Is it not enough to animate and console them, that all heaven is on their side; that celestial principalities and powers are their brethren and fellow labourers; that they are acting with and for the universal church, the holy creation, and the common Head and Father of both? Shall it not comfort us, that every instance of our fidelity and success, every repenting sinner, every improved saint, who ever is converted or edified by our ministry, creates new joy both in heaven and earth, and brings additional honour to the name and kingdom of our Lord? How sublime is the prospect of that day, when all the faithful ministers and hearers of the gospel shall be assembled together, and form one great medium to reflect the glory of God in the face of his Son, on admiring kindred spirits, and at once to excite and assist their eternal praises! That we may share in the triumph of that day, let us explain and recommend the gospel of Christ with such fidelity, clearness, and force, that all men within our reach may have the best advantages to see, and the strongest motives to embrace it.

These sentiments, dear Sir, are addressed to you with peculiar tenderness and ardour. What lowly, yet elevated feelings must they rouse in your bosom at this affecting moment! If Paul, that unrivalled minister of Christ, was humbled to the dust by the greatness of his office, and by personal unworthiness and insufficiency; what reason have we to be abased by similar views? Your entrance on this employment, and your performance of its duties, will, I trust, cherish a solemn impression of that human apostasy, and divine mercy, which originated the scheme of redemption. You will study and unfold this scheme with a deep sense of your own concern in its great discoveries and requirements. This manner of beginning and conducting your minis-

try will render it a constant school of humility, and this humble temper will accelerate the growth of every intellectual and virtuous accomplishment. It will open your mind to truth, and make you ingenuous, devout, and industrious in acquiring it. It will fill your heart, your ministry, and life, as it did those of St. Paul, with a constant stream of piety and charity, with exemplary modesty and contentment, patience and equanimity, amid the trying vicissitudes of your present condition. The spirit I now recommend, far from leading to base timidity or servile compliance, will nourish true dignity and independence of character. It will preserve you from the meanness of selfish ambition and vanity. It will enable you to enjoy popular admiration, and even the esteem of the wise and great, with a sober and thankful mind, and to improve them, as means of more extensive good.

Your heart, I doubt not, gratefully admires the condescending grace of our Lord in calling you thus early into his public service under circumstances so highly auspicious. You will show your gratitude for these tokens of his favour, by affectionately publishing his unsearchable riches, by tenderly adjusting your public and private addresses to the several descriptions of your hearers, and by using every effort of prudent zeal to bring all men into the sacred fellowship of the gospel. Your concern for the best interest of mankind, your knowledge of the Christian system and reverence for its divine Author, will forbid you to accommodate its high discoveries, duties, and sanctions, to the taste of modern pride, or licentiousness, or unbounded liberality. They will constrain you to insist not only on the external decences of a civil, or occasionally solemn deportment, but on a radical repentance of sin, a cordial trust in the

Saviour, a universal purity of heart and conversation, as indispensable conditions, and even ingredients, of the gospel salvation.

May you, Sir, largely imbibe the generous and exalted views of the text. May you centre your glory, pleasure, and wealth, not in the splendid and amusing trifles of this world, but in resembling those great spirits, with whom you are called to act in reuniting men to God and one another, and thus extending the triumph of divine benevolence and created good. By a steady contemplation and pursuit of these objects, may you be qualified to mingle in human society, with a safe and dignified, yet easy affability. May your intercourse with men, like that of your Master, be open and free, yet pure and instructive. May it convince the most cheerful circles, that while the good Christian and minister can enjoy, with temperance and even refinement, the decent pleasures of this life, his chief satisfaction and excellence spring from a far higher source. May your pastoral union with this people be long and happy! May they and their beloved offspring, and even many of their unborn posterity, be your hope and comfort in this world, and your eternal crown of rejoicing in the kingdom of heaven.

*Respected brethren of this church and society*, we greet you on this joyful occasion. We shared with you in the affliction occasioned by the sudden death of your much esteemed BELKNAP, and by the early resignation of his worthy successor. While we offer our affectionate and devout wishes for his confirmed health, and long protracted usefulness to the church of Christ, we bless God for his distinguishing goodness in fixing your speedy and united choice on a person, whose gifts and virtues promise great ministerial usefulness and honour. That this promise may be realized, we ask for him not

only your continued esteem, but your tender and liberal indulgence. Though he is soon to be commissioned, as a humble fellow-worker with celestial principalities and powers, yet he is far from possessing at present their strong and immortal constitution. His delicate health and youthful age, combined with his conspicuous station, his arduous service, and the weight of public expectation, plead both with him and with you for the care of his valuable life, as a mutual and sacred duty. They also solicit the animating concurrence of your Christian prayers and examples, of your steady, solemn, and edifying attendance on his ministry, of your best exertions in your several connexions and employments, to support the honour and extend the influence of vital religion. By this conduct you will cheer and strengthen his anxious mind, and secure to yourselves the gracious presence and benediction of God. Brethren, may your hearts be comforted, being knit together in love. May your society, with its new pastor, cemented and adorned by gospel faith and charity, become a spiritual "building fitly framed together, and growing up to a holy temple in the Lord."

*Men and brethren of this numerous assembly:* If it be the office and glory of ministers to publish the mystery of Christ, it is your corresponding duty and privilege to receive and obey it. To you as well, as to them, is committed a trust of the most solemn, extensive, and lasting import. The minds of many at this day are so filled with the present and political advantages resulting from Christianity, that they seem to forget its high origin, intention, and issue. Some are even willing to consign to the clergy the exclusive honour of that temporal good, which religious institutions promote; for they will not

lend them the weight of their uniform example and influence. But be not deceived; as the gospel came from God, so its leading object is to train you for that glorious and immortal community, of which he is the head. This end cannot be attained, unless you heartily comply, and steadily co-operate, with the Christian system. Let this serious occasion direct your views to that far more solemn period, when all the little interests of time shall be lost in the momentous scenes of eternity. "Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness!" "The Lord grant" to you and me, "that" we "may find mercy of the Lord in that day;" that we may be humble monuments of his praise, "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

## Sermon XXI.

# The Benefits of Affliction.

HEBREWS xii. 9, 10.

*Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he, for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.*

WHAT instructive and soothing words are these to the sons and daughters of affliction! Do the very light and feelings of nature teach us to receive the corrections of the fathers of our flesh, our meaner and mortal part, with reverence, with love, with a quiet submission to their authority, wisdom, and benevolence, in this salutary discipline? And shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, the parent of our nobler and immortal part, the author of our spiritual and divine life, by which we become his children in the highest and happiest sense? Shall we not receive his paternal corrections with dutiful respect, with a hearty submission to his will and design in them? Shall we not thus be in subjection, *and live?* Yea, live in the noblest sense. By this submission to our Father in heaven, we shall be improved and carried forward in a holy and heavenly life, and gradually refined and matured for the life of angels

and perfected spirits in glory. For, as the apostle proceeds, "They verily for a few days chastened us;" that is, during our puerile years, or in order to our good behaviour and welfare during this short and dying life; "after their own pleasure;" according to their fallible, and frequently erroneous judgment; and sometimes according to their capricious humour, or hasty ungoverned passions; whence it happened that their chastisements were not always strictly just; either proportioned to our desert, or adapted to our real benefit: "but He for our profit;" that we may learn and practise the most beneficial lessons; which are all summed up in this, "that we may be partakers of his holiness;" of that holiness of which he is himself the author and pattern; the centre and end; and in which he supremely delights.

The words thus explained present a train of excellent ideas, which are always seasonable and useful to creatures in our situation, surrounded with so many scenes of calamity and distress; but which are peculiarly seasonable at this juncture, when the Father of our spirits has seen fit to visit us with a rapid succession of awful and grievous dispensations.* For, within the space of less than fourteen days, he has stripped this society of four of its members; all of whom, except the last, were cut down in the prime, or the midst of life; and, in addition to this, he has called a considerable number of families in this place, within that compass of time, to bury an aged parent and brother, who had spent some part of his life in the bosom of this parish, and at length expired on its borders. So quick a series, and so great a crowd of bereavements, by which no less than twelve distinct families in this place are at once mourning the deaths of very near relations, has, I think, never been

* This discourse was preached Mar. 28, 1790.

exceeded, nor more than once equalled, since my connexion with the society. And can we suppose, that so many successive strokes of our heavenly Father's rod have no important meaning? Reason as well, as scripture, forbids the idea. No, my fellow mortals and fellow mourners, our dying and dead friends are kind messengers to us from our infinitely wise and good Father; or, as the poet happily expresses it,

> "Are angels sent on errands full of love;
> For us they languish, and for us they die;
> And shall they languish, shall they die in vain?"

Let us, therefore, in the further prosecution of this subject, attend to some of the errands on which these messengers are sent; or, in other words, consider in what respects those fatherly chastisements, which God lays upon us in the death of our friends, are designed and adapted for our profit. The text indeed speaks of divine corrections in general; and it must be granted, that all God's afflictive visitations have the same general language, the same kind and benevolent tendency and design; they are all calculated to embitter sin to us, to mortify our pride, vanity, and worldly affection; to rouse up our minds to a just, deep, enlarged, and most salutary train of thought; and, in a word, to exercise and brighten the whole circle of Christian graces; particularly faith, patience, humility, submission, supreme love to God, and trust in him.

Let me further premise, that the deaths of our fellow men in general, where there is no special tie of kindred, of friendship, or even of acquaintance to unite us to them, hold up very profitable instructions to our minds; and every wise and pious observer will reap some improvement from them. He will learn more and more of the vanity of man, even in his best estate: he will grow

more humble, and dependent on the eternal God: he will read the dreadful evil of sin on every coffin and every tombstone: he will feel himself called and roused by every death he witnesses, to prepare for his own, and to put every thing in the best readiness for his solemn entrance into the eternal world. And if every instance of human mortality is thus pregnant with rich profit to the attentive mind, much more those, which strike nearest to our hearts, which tear from us our dearest lovers, friends, and acquaintance!

Let us survey a number of particulars, in which the removal of these is calculated, and may be improved, for our benefit. And

First, It shows us the insufficiency and emptiness of the most beloved and valuable creature comforts. To render this observation more impressive, let me instance in some of those connexions, which death has lately broken asunder. Some of you have lost a son in the bud of childhood, or the flower and glory of youth. None, but the fond hearts of parents can tell, how dear, how interesting, how transporting these comforts are; how they twine about our heart-strings, and engross that affection and dependence, which are due only to the Being of beings. And none but the parental bosom can tell how it tears the very soul, when God roots up these tender plants, and withers the blossom from which we fondly expected such rich and pleasant fruit! Where is now your delight, your hope, your towering fabric of expectation, ye bereaved, mourning parents? Alas! buried in the same coffins and graves with your departed children! What a lesson is here of creature emptiness! Some of you have lost a beloved partner, a bosom friend, who was your helper and your support under the daily cares and difficulties of life; your sec-

ond self, to divide your sorrows and double your joys; and with tender and faithful assiduity to promote your interest and comfort. But God, by removing this prop, is teaching you, in the most forcible manner, what a weak support, what a poor helper, what a feeble, short lived friend this is on which you have so fondly leaned! Others of you have lost a parent, who was the guide, the counsellor, the guardian, of your younger years! but death is now teaching you the insufficiency of such a guide and patron, who has left you in the midst of your journey, through this dark and perilous wilderness. Others have lost a beloved brother; and God, by this dispensation, is teaching you, that the ties and sweets of natural brotherhood and friendship are a very scanty, precarious foundation on which to build solid, permanent happiness. Thus the deaths of any near and much loved friends proclaim, with a very loud and affecting voice, the vanity of all created comforts, and warn us in the language of the poet,

> Beware what earth calls happiness: beware
> All joys, but those that never can expire.
> Lean not on earth; 'twill pierce thee to the heart;
> A broken reed at best; but oft a spear;
> On its sharp point peace bleeds, and hope expires.

II. The death of our friends is calculated to lead, yea, drive us to a more immediate and constant dependence on God. The stream is dried up in order to force us back to the fountain. These twinkling stars set in darkness, in order to make us prize and seek the beams of the Sun of righteousness. These earthly idols are turned out of our hearts, to make room for the King of glory, the sovereign beauty and good, to enter and fill them. While our friends were alive and flourishing around us, we were apt to trust in and live upon them;

to rest as it were our whole weight upon them; to make them our refuge and high tower, our sun and our shield. But when death comes and beats down this tower, and breaks this shield to pieces, and turns this feeble sun into darkness, then we feel a kind of necessity of looking out for some better refuge; of looking and flying to God, as our sun and our shield; then the attentive and pious mind will eagerly repair to the Bible, the fountain of divine consolations, which flow in that blessed volume, and will feel a new, a seasonable relief, and delight in surveying those kind, condescending characters and relations, which God and his Son have there assumed, for the comfort of his people in all their various distresses.

For instance; when we lose an earthly parent, with what pleasure will the thoughtful and serious mind, in such a circumstance, read, and, as it were, cling to these words of the psalmist; "When my father or my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." Or when the Christian loses the dear companion of his life, with what eagerness and satisfaction does he fly into the arms of Jesus, as a bosom friend, a husband, a companion, who can never fail him! And in the loss of a natural brother, what pleasure is there in the thought, that Jesus Christ is become the natural, sympathizing brother of man, by partaking in our nature and sorrows, and offers to become our spiritual brother by regenerating and adopting grace! In short, the loss of any dear, earthly connexion, is powerfully adapted, as a mean to make us prize, and seek, and secure, a spiritual, indissoluble connexion with the infinite God and his divine Son, in whom we may regain, to unspeakable advantage, the endearments and sweets of all those relations and ties of love, which death has broken, or can dissolve.

III. The removal of dear friends calls to an important trial of our love to God, and submission to his sovereignty. When God tears from our arms and our hearts some favourite creature, he hereby practically puts the same question to us, which Christ did to Peter; "Lovest thou me? lovest thou me more than these creature delights? Art thou willing to resign them at my call? Thou hast called me thy Lord and Sovereign; I am now come to bring thy sincerity to the test. Art thou willing I should be sovereign in this instance? Canst thou give up thy dearest comforts to me—to my absolute disposal? I gave up my Son to death for thee; and hast thou any thing so near and dear to thee, as my Son was to me?"

And now, ye bereaved mourners, what answer do your hearts give to these divine questions? Do you find, upon trial, that you really love God and his will above all things, so that you can surrender any thing when his pleasure and glory demand it? If so, what a comfortable, what a glorious example is hereby exhibited of your gracious sincerity! an example which at once greatly honours God, edifies and strengthens good men, presents matter of conviction to the wicked as well, as affords great satisfaction and benefit to yourselves. There is no frame of mind so sweet and so reasonable, as a cheerful and entire acquiescence in the will of God. And this salutary lesson is to be chiefly learned in the school of affliction. And perhaps no kind of affliction is better fitted to teach it, than this. In many other calamities there is such a mixture of human interposition, that we are ready to imagine we may be allowed to complain, and to chide a little; and, while we feel a mixture of indignation against the instrument, we are apt to forget the great First Cause and Disposer of our trials. But

here it is so evidently his hand, that we *must* refer it to him; and it will appear daring impiety to quarrel at what is done. In other instances, we can at least flatter ourselves with hope, that the calamity may be diverted, or the enjoyment recovered: but here, alas! there is no such hope; for the last fatal stroke is irrecoverably given; so that opposition is vain; and a forced submission gives but little rest to the mind: a cordial acquiescence in the divine will is the only thing in the whole world, that can ease the struggling heart, and restore it to true peace. Remaining corruptions will work in the best Christians on so trying an occasion. This will lead them to an attentive review of the great reasons for submission. It will lead them to press these arguments on their own souls, and to plead them with God in prayer; till at length the storm is laid; and tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience a hope, which maketh not ashamed, while the love of God is so shed abroad in the heart, as to humble it for every preceding opposition, and to bring it to an entire and delightful approbation of all that so wise and gracious a Father has done; giving up every temporal interest and enjoyment to his disposal, and sitting down with the sweet resolution of the prophet,—"Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." When we are brought to this, the whole horizon clears at once, and the sun breaks forth in its strength.

IV. The deaths of beloved relatives are dispensations excellently adapted to lead us into a deeper knowledge of what is amiss in our hearts. They, as it were, sift our carnal and perverse hearts to the bottom, and bring

up to our view a great deal of lurking pride, selfishness, idolatrous affection to creatures, and rebellious opposition to the Creator. These evil dispositions, perhaps, lay quite out of sight, and in a great measure dormant, so long, as God smiled upon us, and gratified our ardent desires with a constant series of temporal comforts. But, when he reverses the scene, and crosses these fond inclinations; then our pride and selfishness begin to swell, and burst into impatient and murmuring sentiments against him. Then our extreme reluctance to parting with creature comforts at God's command, and the long and excessive sorrow, which attends the parting stroke, too plainly shows, that we insensibly idolized these comforts, that we placed the creature in the room of the Creator, and that we are ready to quarrel with God for disturbing us in our sinful idolatry. Thus the school of bereavement teaches us more and more of the depths of wickedness in the human heart, and our pressing need of supernatural grace to rectify these disorders; and thus tends to promote a spirit of deep humility, earnest prayerfulness, godly self-jealousy, and constant vigilance.

V. The death of friends operates for our profit, when it awakens us to a solemn and tender recollection of our conduct toward them, whether it has been in all respects right or not; and when it quickens us in our duty to surviving relatives. While they are alive and present with us, our neglect of duty toward them does not so soon strike our consciences. But when the stroke of death divides them from us in this world forever, we are ready then to bethink ourselves, whether we have fully performed our duty to them. "Did I always render that filial affection, that submissive tenderness to my departed parent, which became a child? Did I pay due honour and obedience to parental instructions, counsels,

and admonitions, especially those, which regarded my religious and eternal concerns? Did I carefully and faithfully instruct the child, which I have lost, in the great things of God, of heaven, and eternity, and endeavour to train him up for the service and enjoyment of his Creator? What have I done for the spiritual and everlasting welfare and comfort of the dear partner, or brother, whom Providence has now placed beyond the possibility of ever receiving any further benefit from my friendly assistance? O did I live and converse with my now deceased relative, as became those, who were brethren and companions in the spirit as well, as in the flesh? Did we endeavour to quicken each other's pious zeal and love, and help one another onward in the road to heaven?" O how must such inquiries convict the best of us, of very great negligence toward our beloved friends, who are now departed! And how powerfully must such a conviction operate to overwhelm us with penitential grief for such neglects; and to double our zeal and diligence toward those, who yet survive! This will be the most substantial proof of our affection both to the dead and the living. And could our deceased relatives arise from their graves, or address us from the invisible world, they would call upon us to show our respect in this way, by weeping not so much for them, as for ourselves and our children; by turning the whole tide of our affections and sorrows for them, into the channel of redoubled zeal and care for the salvation of our own souls, and those of our dear surviving friends.

I might mention many other particulars in which such strokes of bereavement are well adapted means of profiting the living. But here, to prevent mistakes, I must subjoin this explanatory observation, that these divine chastisements, in order to their reaching these salutary ends, must be accompanied on the one hand with the

inward teachings and impressions of divine grace, and on the other, with sincere desires and endeavours on our part to endure and improve aright. If those, who are visited with these corrections, pay little or no attention to the great moral purposes for which they are sent; if they do not make it their great concern to learn those divine lessons, which they are designed to inculcate; if, instead of this, they either stupidly overlook, or scornfully despise, or peevishly censure, or disconsolately sink under God's chastising hand, in all these cases, affliction, instead of profiting, will rather harden and confirm them in their evil dispositions. Therefore, by way of improvement,

1st. We may learn the true import of the phrase, which is so often on our tongues, in our addresses both to God and men. I mean when we express a wish, or a petition, that such an affliction *may be sanctified* to ourselves or to others. Then is affliction sanctified to a person, when he is truly sanctified by the affliction; or is so profited, as to be made a partaker of God's holiness; when his love and conformity to God, and preparation for the final enjoyment of him are hereby increased. "O that this bereavement may be sanctified to me," is a language frequently spoken; but what sense, or what sincerity is there in this expression, as used by those persons, who appear to have no thought nor desire of being made better by their affliction; who manifest no earnest solicitude to have their proud, worldly, idolatrous affections cured by this discipline; but who will perhaps indulge those very unsanctified tempers under the rod, which directly contradict and defeat a sanctified and beneficial improvement of it? Again,

2. Our subject teaches us, that the best way of mourning our departed friends, is by really profiting by their deaths; by living as they desire; by living agree-

ably to their dying advice; to the forcible eloquence of their expiring groans, their solemn funeral solemnities, and their sacred, but mouldering tombs: to behave in such a manner, as would best please and gratify them, if they could distinctly view our conduct from the world of spirits. It is not enough, ye mourners, to drop a few tears at the decease or burial of your dear relatives, and then go away and forget, or treat with neglect, the silent and soft address of their death beds, or their last friendly counsels to you, and good wishes and prayers for you. To do this, is to act as senseless a part, as the herds, which trample and graze upon their graves; it is to tread under feet their agonies, to trifle with their anguish, and frustrate their death. Therefore,

3. Let us all examine how we have felt and behaved under such strokes as these. Especially let those of us make the inquiry, whose hearts God has lately wounded in this way. Let each of us ask his own heart, Have I seen the emptiness of creatures, and recalled my hope and confidence from every thing below God? Have I, in this severe trial, felt my heart bow in quiet subjection to the great Father of spirits? Have I showed, that I loved God above the dearest creature enjoyments, so that I could willingly acquiesce in his sovereign pleasure, and give up my beloved friend at his demand? Have I, by this affliction, been led into a more thorough acquaintance with my own heart, and been made truly humble and penitent for those inordinate, those idolatrous, those rebellious affections, which lurk there? Have I been led to a serious review of my past behaviour toward my relatives deceased; and do I feel thankful to God for whatever kindness and duty he has enabled me to perform to them, and penitent for every instance of neglect and unfaithfulness? Am I quickened hereby to

greater zeal and fidelity in discharging my duty to my surviving friends? Do I feel my heart more disengaged from earth, more weaned from life, more reconciled to death, and more attracted to the world of spirits, now another beloved object has gone thither before me? Do I feel and live more as a borderer on the eternal world, since a part of me has now fled to it? And am I ready to follow, if I should quickly receive the summons? Happy, thrice happy, those mourners, who are taught to improve the death of friends to such noble purposes! The temporal loss, in this case, is converted into infinite, immortal gain. But if any of us are not engaged in making this improvement, we have reason to mourn with an emphasis; for we have lost not only our dear relatives, but likewise the whole spirit and benefit of the affliction. We have cause to weep, not merely over the dead bodies of our friends, but over our own stupid, dead, miserable souls, which are a thousand times more shocking spectacles.

To conclude; let all the members of this society, whether old or young, parents or children; whether partners in the nuptial relation, or brethren and sisters of the same family; let them all attend to those important lessons, which such a crowd of deaths addresses to each of them respectively. By these strokes as well, as in numberless other ways, God has been often warning and reproving you. O beware! lest, by a stupid or perverse disregard, you incur that awful doom, Proverbs xxix. 1. "HE THAT, BEING OFTEN REPROVED, HARDENETH HIS NECK, SHALL SUDDENLY BE DESTROYED, AND THAT WITHOUT REMEDY."

# Sermon XXII.

## On the Duty and Advantages of worshipping God.*

PSALM XCV. 6.

*O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*

IN an age, like the present, when the duties of piety, especially the public offices of devotion, are either superficially attended, carelessly omitted, or openly ridiculed; when every thing, which indicates a scrupulous or fervent performance of them, is styled vulgar superstition or enthusiasm; it may not be unprofitable to employ a few moments in explaining, recommending, and vindicating the good old practice of worshipping the Lord our Maker. The earnest invitation to this duty, contained in our text and in numberless similar passages of scripture, prove, that the observance of it is of high antiquity, and has ever formed a distinguished trait in the most excellent human characters.

To worship God, in the largest sense of the phrase, is to entertain just sentiments of him in our understandings, with correspondent affections toward him in our hearts; and to manifest these in our external language and behaviour, especially in solemn stated exercises of adoration and praise, of prayer and thanksgiving. The sever-

* The substance of this discourse was delivered at a public lecture, in Harvard University, Feb. 25, 1794.

al inward affections toward the Deity, which constitute the soul of acceptable worship, and of all religious goodness, may be summed up in two words, veneration and love; the former comporting with the majestic and awful, the latter, with the more amiable and beneficent attributes of God.

That we ought to possess these internal feelings toward our Maker, and to express and promote them by frequent acts both of private and social worship, may be proved by various topics of argument.

Such pious exercises are, in the first place, fit and beautiful in themselves.

They correspond to the nature both of God and man. They are a just tribute to the various perfections and relations of the Deity, and most congenial to the nobler powers and affections of his dependent and rational offspring. Is it not entirely reasonable and congruous, that we should admire supreme greatness, dread infinite power and justice, love perfect goodness and beauty, confide in unchangeable mercy and truth, and cheerfully submit to unerring wisdom and rectitude? Does not our conscious, unceasing dependence upon the Being, who made us, oblige us to constant prayer? Does not every ray of comfort and of hope, which enlightens and cheers our existence, demand our fervent gratitude and praise to him, who is continually dispensing these refreshing beams? Does the tenderness of a parent, the fidelity of a friend, or the still greater virtues of the patriot swell our bosoms with unutterable sentiments of grateful respect? And is the original, the universal Parent, Friend, and Benefactor, the great Inspirer of every thing, which is amiable or kind in his creatures; is he to be treated with cold or contemptuous neglect? Shall those overflowings of heart, those ardent acknowledg-

ments, which imperfect human excellence and beneficence command, be ridiculed as foolish superstition or enthusiasm, when paid to the infinite summary and fountain of good? How absurd is that philosophy, how preposterous those pretensions to wit or liberality, which can thus pour contempt on the most rational and noble employment of man? The eye of true philosophy perceives a far higher fitness, proportion, and beauty in such devout exercises of intelligent creatures toward their infinitely glorious and beneficent Creator, than in the application of similar or equal mathematical figures, one to another, or the most orderly mutual adjustment of natural bodies. It pronounces that Being to be the proper adequate object of our understandings and hearts, who is at once the first truth and the sovereign good. It proclaims him to be a pitiful and wretched philosopher, who stops at visible effects and secondary causes, while he overlooks or despises the prime Mover, the glorious, all pervading Spirit of the universe. Sound philosophy, therefore, both natural and moral, directly leads to devotion, and terminates in it, as its proper end and its highest perfection.

We may add, the main dignity of our nature, as distinguished from the inanimate and the brutal, consists in our capacity of contemplating, adoring, and enjoying the great Author and Ruler of the universe.

Man, therefore, is evidently constituted the high priest of the visible creation, and is placed in this august temple of the Deity, that he may offer up the incense of devout homage and praise for himself and for all inferior creatures.

It deserves our special attention, that mankind are plainly formed for this sacred employment, not only in their individual, but also in their social capacity. As we

are capable of, and strongly inclined to society, and derive a large portion of our pleasures and advantages from a mutual communication of our thoughts and feelings; it follows, that our devotional sentiments as well, as others ought to be expressed, enlivened, and improved by social intercourse, or by united petitions and thanksgivings to the common source of all our blessings and hopes. As there are in every society, whether domestic or literary, religious or political, common privileges, comforts, and wants, a due sense of these cannot be manifested but by common or joint exercises of devotion.

Accordingly, social or public worship of the Deity has been instituted and practised by all nations of men from the beginning to this day; and the appointment of a weekly Sabbath, for this important purpose, is coeval with the creation.

Which leads us to add, that devout exercises toward the Most High are frequently enjoined in the Word of God, as an essential part and instrument of virtue. The worship of our Maker in the closet, in the family, and in public, is recommended in scripture by precept and example, by divine incitement and promise.

This remark anticipates, and sufficiently refutes an objection, which is sometimes brought against vocal, and especially public addresses to our Maker. It is said, that these outward forms are of no advantage either to God or man; that rational homage to our Creator consists wholly in proper sentiments and dispositions of mind; and that these are best cultivated by private study and meditation.

To this we reply, if these pious sentiments and feelings exist with due vigour in our bosoms, they will break forth into direct and fervent acknowledgments; they will prompt the most open and expressive testimo-

nies of respect and gratitude to their infinite object. This assertion is verified by the obvious frame and constant experience of mankind. How did the reverence and affection of Americans toward their admired WASHINGTON burst forth into the most emulous and ardent expressions of love and honour, when he favoured the several states, a few years since, with his presence?

In short, the propriety and obligation of public religious worship are enforced by three distinct and weighty considerations.

First, by the regard, which we owe to the Deity.

As we have already shown, that pious inward sentiments and emotions toward our Creator are the glory of our nature; so a decent and manly avowal of these sentiments, before the world, is a tribute, which we owe to God as well, as to man. This avowal is strikingly made by public devotion. Certainly no sober person can think, that he discharges his duty to God, if his piety shrinks from the public eye, and conceals itself under the veil of retirement, as though he were ashamed of his intercession with the Author and end of his being.

If, my brethren, we really believe in the existence and perfections, the revelation and providence of God, let us show our faith by our practice; not indeed by an ostentatious, superstitious, or fanatical display of religious strictness and zeal; but by a regular attendance on those venerable Christian institutions, which are significant and honourable memorials of the Deity to all the surrounding world. If a principle of rational and scriptural piety be established in our hearts, it will be generous, ardent, and diffusive; we shall feel, that our own solitary homage is too small a tribute to the Being, whom we adore; we shall wish to kindle the same de-

vout flame in every creature around us; and, like the fervent psalmist, we shall call on the earth and heavens, on angels and men, to unite in swelling the song of praise. Which leads me,

Secondly, to enforce this duty by the regard we owe to mankind.

Even enlightened deists and atheists have confessed the utility of religion, and especially of Christianity, to human society. Consequently, on their own principles, they ought to reverence and support those institutions, by which its influence is preserved and diffused. But how much greater is this obligation on those, who professedly believe not only in the excellence and usefulness, but also in the divine authenticity of the gospel; who believe, that it is at once a well adapted and divinely appointed mean of making men good and happy, both for this world and the next? How eminently does this consideration bind the duty before us on those, whose wealth, station, or influence renders their example peculiarly efficacious on the lower orders of society! Common humanity, and even policy as well, as Christian benevolence should induce such persons to go before the multitude in the road of exemplary virtue and religion, particularly in a conspicuous regard to the duties of public Christian worship and institutions on the Lord's day, which are granted to be peculiarly beneficial and consolatory to the poor and labouring part of the community. It is a just and striking observation of the great Mr. Neckar, that "the appointment of a day of weekly rest and social worship, especially as connected with public instruction in Christian piety and morality, is a most benevolent act to the great mass of mankind, and the result of enlarged and generous policy, if viewed merely in its aspect upon the order and happiness of society."

How important, then, is it, that the dependent and illiterate multitude should be taught and encouraged by the example of their superiors duly to estimate and improve these precious advantages! How cruel, how extensively pernicious the effect, when the poor are instructed by the conduct of the rich, and the more ignorant by the practice of the learned, that there is no truth in the doctrines, no obligation in the precepts, no advantage in the public ceremonies, no reality in the consolations and hopes of Christianity! This leads me to add,

Thirdly, that these public exercises of religion are recommended to us by the great private advantages, which may accrue to ourselves.

Even those, who move in the highest or most illuminated spheres of society, may derive much improvement from this source. Their religious and moral principles will receive new vigour and confirmation by the habit of openly avowing and exercising them in the presence and society of others. The weekly return of these duties suspends that perpetual current of professional business, of worldly cares or amusements, which would otherwise leave little or no leisure nor disposition for serious reflection. It calls us away from the scenes of dissipation; awakens the mind from its enchanting delirium; places its own moral picture steadily before it; and makes it feel its connexion with a moral governor and an eternal Judge. It enlightens and awes; it quickens and comforts us afresh with the great principles and prospects of revelation. In so impure and tempting a region, as the present world, the most contemplative, improved, and virtuous characters need a frequent and lively inculcation of those divine truths, by which religious goodness is nourished and fortified. How much more needful, then, is this inculcation to the ignorant,

the careless, and the vicious! To all which, we may add, that the gracious presence of God, by his awakening, sanctifying, and comforting Spirit is, by the promises of scripture, eminently connected with a serious and uniform attendance on the duties of his sanctuary. In this respect "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more, than all the dwellings of Jacob."

These observations anticipate and sufficiently answer several modern objections, which are brought against the public forms of religious worship.

Can a person, then, duly realize and be properly affected with the constant presence, the transcendent perfections and benefits of the Deity, without testifying his regards to him by the exercises both of private and public devotion? Besides, devout affections, like all others, are not only naturally expressed, but enlivened and increased by correspondent, external behaviour and language; insomuch, that every sincere act of worship, even in private, cherishes the inward flame of devotion, and promotes every pious and virtuous disposition in a far more effectual manner, than can be done by mere contemplation.

But public worship produces this effect in a still higher degree; for it raises and improves devotional feelings by the power of sympathy and example. The pious fervour of one is hereby communicated to another, and thus extends its influence to all the spectators.

It also refines and strengthens the social affections. By frequently approaching our heavenly Parent, in united worship, we are led to feel toward one another, as children of one family, as standing on a level in the presence of our impartial and merciful Judge; and thus it levels the little distinctions of rank, of personal or

mental accomplishments; cherishes a truly republican and Christian equality; and cements all classes of society in the bonds of mutual kindness and charity.

In short, social worship, joined with public, religious instruction, is the grand instrument of spreading knowledge and civilization, humanity and piety, through the community, and of handing them down to future generations.

It is evident, that these great objects could not be attained by private reading, meditation, or even devotion, however seriously or steadily performed. Suppose, for example, the anniversary of American independence were observed only by those refined individuals, who could entertain and improve their minds by reading or reflecting on that great event in studious retirement; would this answer the purposes of such an annual commemoration? Would it diffuse and imprint upon the public mind a just and impressive idea of our glorious revolution? Would it enlighten and warm the rising generation with the sentiments of American freedom and polity? Would it serve to transmit these sentiments to our unborn posterity? Your own reflections immediately answer these questions, and apply them to the subject before us.

I have dwelt the longer on this subject, because a careless, and even contemptuous disregard to the duties of piety, especially to the public offices of devotion, is a leading feature of the present age. A punctual and serious attendance on these religious forms is ridiculed by many, as vulgar superstition; while every thing, which savours of inward, fervent devotion, is styled fanatic delusion. It is readily granted, that both superstition and enthusiasm are very absurd, uncomfortable, and dangerous things. We will also grant, that the re-

ligion of many of our ancestors was deformed with a mixture of these gloomy ingredients. But, while we eagerly fly from these extremes, let us not precipitate ourselves into the opposite evils. Let us not neglect and despise all devotion both in its inward spirit and external institutions. Let us remember, that piety towards our Maker is our first and highest duty; that it is the noblest and the only sure support of moral virtue and social order; and that a regular observance of the outward signs and means of religion is the only method of promoting and perpetuating its influence in the present and succeeding generations.

Were these forms wholly laid aside, a sense of religious, moral, and even civil propriety and obligation would rapidly decline, and the great mass of the people sink into pagan ignorance and barbarity. Accordingly, the Roman emperor Julian, a very sagacious and bitter enemy of Christianity, was so struck with the good effects, which public worship and instruction had upon the Christians of that age, that he recommended their example in this respect to his heathen subjects, and directed their philosophers to give stated weekly lectures, as the best method of restoring and extending their old idolatrous religion.

The ideas suggested in this discourse ought to have peculiar weight with such a respectable society, as I am now addressing. Both God and man justly expect, that the first University in America should be the prime nursery and pattern of every species of excellence, both intellectual and moral. Be ambitious, then, my young hearers, to fulfil this reasonable expectation. Remember, that enlightened and warm devotion toward your Maker, expressed and promoted by an orderly and se-

rious attendance on the daily and religious oblations of this literary family as well, as on the weekly solemnities of public worship, is necessary to complete your character, both as scholars, gentlemen, and Christians, and to secure your future acceptance, usefulness, and honour in the higher departments of civil and religious society.

Let me then urge this duty upon you by every argument of common propriety and decorum; of humanity and friendship to the lower classes of the people, who look to you for an example; of respect to human and divine laws, and to the sentiments and practice of the wisest and best men in all ages; of genuine regard to the welfare of your country, and to our own true peace and glory in this world and the next as well, as due reverence and gratitude to your infinite Creator. Be ever on your guard against every thing, which might betray you into a contempt either of religion itself, or of the means, which are necessary to support it. Beware of the fashionable scepticism and scoffing infidelity of the age. Beware of that liberal, but false philosophy, which places the whole duty and happiness of man in the cold performance of civil and social virtue. Remember, that the interests of morality and of society are essentially connected with those of religion. Beware too of that thoughtless levity and that unbounded love of pleasure, which too naturally spring up amid the sunshine of worldly affluence, joined with youthful vigour and vivacity. An intermixture of decent and manly amusement is at once graceful and beneficial in the period of youth, and amidst the fatiguing studies of a collegiate life. But a perpetual giddiness of mind, which never pauses to reflect seriously on the high destination and prospects of man, or which hurries along in an unceas-

ing career of low and debasing indulgence, is very unbecoming the votaries of science, who ought to be capable of more close, refined, philosophic thinking and acting, than vulgar mortals, and ought never to sacrifice the noble enjoyments of rational and moral, of religious and immortal beings, to trifling and sordid pursuits.

Beware too of that learned pride, or vain self conceit, which is apt to raise young students, in their own imagination, above the need of public, religious instruction or worship, or which inspires disgust and contempt of every public speaker or performance, which falls below their high and delicate standard. Remember, that the great design of public devotional exercises is not merely to entertain, or even to instruct, but to excite, express, and promote pious and virtuous sentiments of heart; and that persons of the most improved understandings need, and may be benefited by them in this view, even though they suggest no new idea to their minds, nor afford much gratification to a nice and curious taste. It also merits consideration, that a large majority of our common worshipping assemblies, on the Lord's day, is composed of illiterate hearers; that these peculiarly need the advantages of public, religious instruction; and that, in order to meet their capacities and feelings, and thus accomplish the most extensive good, the learned speaker and his more delicate hearers, must be generously willing to forego many pleasing refinements both of sentiment and expression. Such condescending and benevolent sacrifices are recommended by the best writers on pulpit eloquence as well, as by the best models of it, which the world has produced.

These free, but friendly hints of advice will, I hope, be received with the same candid temper, with which they are given; and may they operate by the divine blessing to revive the credit and practice of serious devotion in this important nursery; and hence may it spread into every department of the American community.

# Sermon XXIII.

## On Forgiveness.

MATTHEW vi. 12.

*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

THAT divine model of devotion, of which these words are a part, is equally distinguished for its brevity and fulness, its plainness and grandeur, its universal suitableness and importance. In these several respects it unspeakably transcends the highest productions of man. While it unites the interests of heaven and earth, of time and eternity, in six short petitions; it is remarkable, that the three first of these respect the name, the kingdom, and will of God; while the other three contemplate our own temporal and spiritual welfare. This arrangement as well, as the reason of things, instructs us to set up the honour and pleasure of Deity, and the general happiness of his moral empire, as the prime object of our prayers and pursuits, and by this to direct, limit, and consecrate our desires of personal and inferior good. We are to ask our daily bread, the pardon of our offences, deliverance from temptation and all evil, not merely for selfish purposes, but with a leading view to the service, the glory, and enjoyment of our Maker.

The petition, selected for our present consideration, directs us to pray to God for the *forgiveness of our debts*, and to enforce the request by a plea founded on *our* forgiveness of the debts or trespasses of others.

The phrase *our debts* is equivalent to *our sins*, as it is expressed by another evangelist. Our sins are properly styled *debts*, because they render us debtors to the injured law and honour of God, and the violated order and peace of his dominions, and in some cases directly infringe the rights of our fellow creatures. Of course they lay us under obligation either to repair the injury committed, or to suffer a penalty proportioned to it. Consequently, the *forgiveness* of our trespasses is a gracious discharge from this obligation, or from this debt of personal satisfaction or punishment for our transgressions. The petition before us is, therefore, a request, that God would release us from the threatened and deserved penalty of his just, but violated law, and finally treat us, as though we had never offended. It implies a request, that our merciful Sovereign would not only cancel our past guilt, but confer on us all the privileges and comforts of his reconciled and paternal favour, and introduce us to that transcendent blessedness, which the gospel covenant ensures to those, whose transgressions are forgiven.

In contemplating the forgiveness of sin, three things claim our special attention, viz. the original source, the meritorious ground, and the appointed instrument of this blessing.

Its original source is the free, unsolicited benevolence of God. Its moral ground is the meritorious obedience and sacrifice of his Son. Its appointed condition is a penitent and obedient faith, or such a temper and conduct on our part, as become guilty offenders, favoured with the offer of mediatorial mercy. In other words, the terms of remission, prescribed both by the gospel constitution and the fitness of things, are a deep repentance of sin, a cordial acceptance of offered

pardon, as the free gift of God through the atonement of his Son, fervent love and thanksgiving to our merciful, forgiving Father and Redeemer, and a zealous care to imitate and honour them by forgiving and doing good to our fellow servants, and by the studious practice of universal holiness.

These observations illustrate both the propriety and the true import of the petition before us. For since a spirit of evangelical repentance, faith, and obedience is essentially pre-requisite to forgiveness, and since the daily, moral imperfections and irregularities even of the best Christians call for the fresh exercises of humble and believing penitence, in order to a renewed remission of guilt; it follows, that daily prayer to God for pardon is the proper and indispensable duty of all; for it is but a natural and decent expression of conscious depravity and guilt, of becoming humility and repentance, and a suitable acknowledgment both of the sovereign mercy and justice of God. Hereby the humble suppliant pays due honour both to God and the Mediator, to the law, which condemns sin, and to the gospel, which pardons it; he cordially owns and extols the righteousness of the one, and the grace of the other. The spirit, therefore, of this petition, implies, that the person offering it not only feels himself to be a sinner, but heartily condemns and forsakes every evil propensity and practice. Without this disposition, the offender virtually justifies his disobedience, declares his resolution to continue in it, and spurns that mercy, which offers to pardon it. If such a person verbally beg divine forgiveness, he evidently does it in a manner perfectly unmeaning and hypocritical; at best he resorts to it merely, as a refuge from impending but unmerited punishment, or an opiate for a disturbed, self-condemning

mind, or a comforting licence for future transgressions. It is plain, both from reason and scripture, that such a hollow and even insolent petition cannot be accepted by the Deity, and that a heart, truly humbled and contrite for its offences, must give life, and beauty, and efficacy to the prayer of the text. This contrite and penitent disposition must also be united with evangelical faith, or a constant regard to the mediation of Christ, as the appointed channel of God's pardoning mercy. This is what is meant by praying in the name of Jesus, which is every where required in the New Testament, and which forms the leading trait in the prayers of Christians, as distinguished from those of heathens and infidels.

Another virtuous disposition, which ought to characterize our supplications for divine forgiveness, is a corresponding temper towards our fellow creatures; "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." By "our debtors" are intended those, who, in any respect, injure us, either in our persons, reputation, interest, or comfort. The Christian duty of forgiveness does not require a stoical or affected insensibility of such injurious treatment; for the gospel aims to regulate, not to extinguish the innocent feelings of nature. Nor does the duty before us forbid our expressing to the injurious party a proper indignation and grief at his misconduct, and prudently attempting his conviction and amendment: on the contrary, the scripture enjoins us to go to our offending brother, and privately tell him his fault: its direction is, "thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; but thou shalt in any wise rebuke him, and not suffer sin upon him." This text implies, that a neglect to reprove an offender is a proof of hatred rather, than of love. Nor does the duty in question prohibit us from seeking satisfaction from those, who have in-

jured us. The laws of God, of self preservation, and of civil society warrant us in such cases to do justice to ourselves. Accordingly, the rules of Christianity require the injurious person to go and make satisfaction to his offended brother, and even to defer the performance of religious worship, till he has honestly attempted this reconciliation; and without this previous step his acts of devotion will not be accepted. Now if the gospel obliges the offender to give satisfaction, it authorises the party offended to expect and demand it. Nor does this duty universally imply an obligation to express our forgiveness in direct terms to those who have wronged us. We are bound to do this to those offenders only, who come to us with a due acknowledgment of their fault and desire of our forgiveness.

But the duty of forgiving offenders implies, in the First place, that we sincerely love them notwithstanding their injurious conduct. The second great command of the law, *thou shalt love thy neighbour, as thyself*, is immutably binding upon every man, especially on every Christian; and nothing in himself or his neighbour can excuse his violation of it. If my brother has transgressed this law of love in his behaviour to me; this will by no means annul my duty to him. If I truly loved him previously to his offence, and heartily forgive him since; I shall still feel the same benevolent affection towards him as before. Agreeably, our divine Lord extends the duty of love to our most malignant and injurious foes: "I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you; and pray for them that despitefully use you." It is clear, therefore, that the indulgence of an angry, sullen, or malicious disposition towards a person, who has wronged or affronted us, is as remote from the

spirit of Christian forgiveness, as darkness is from light, or hell from heaven.

Secondly. This duty implies a sincere desire and resolved pursuit of the welfare of those, who have injured us, and a heart felt satisfaction in their temporal and spiritual prosperity. This is the immediate fruit of that affectionate good will, which, as we have just seen, is included in forgiveness. The man, therefore, who thirsts for revenge on an offending brother, and eagerly lays hold of opportunities for it; or who beholds with pleasure his misfortunes and ruin, has a spirit directly opposite to that of the text.

Thirdly. This duty requires a readiness of mind to confer with the offending party, to be reconciled to him on mild and equitable terms, and upon his offering due satisfaction, to comfort him with a frank assurance of our forgiveness and kindness. Consequently, when a person observes an unreasonably distant and strange behaviour towards an offending neighbour, and studiously avoids every opportunity of conversation and reconcilement; or insists on very rigid terms of accommodation; or lastly, is *forced* into a reconciliation, and with great reluctance expresses his forgiveness; in each of these cases he betrays dark symptoms of a secret grudge or enmity, inconsistent with the Christian spirit. In a word, the temper of forgiveness in us must be habitual, constant, and universal; it must immediately exert itself on every occasion of provocation or injury without waiting for the offender to come and make satisfaction; that is, we must instantly and uninterruptedly feel toward him such a frame of heart, as we have just described, even though he persists in his offensive conduct. This is evidently implied in the petition before us; which directs us to exercise a forgiving spirit towards all, who

have injured us, as often as we pray to God for his pardoning mercy. What a solemn obligation does this impose upon us to cherish a constant flow of good will to all, even to our most unreasonable and persevering foes! In another place our Saviour directs his disciples, "when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any man; that your Father in heaven may forgive you." Accordingly, an inspired apostle cautions us "not to let the sun go down upon our wrath;" for in this case we should be unfit for our evening devotions, and could not lie down to sleep with Christian confidence and peace. The same apostle directs us, whenever and wherever we pray, to lift up holy hands *without wrath*.

These observations suggest an important distinction on this subject; I mean the distinction between two kinds of forgiveness, one of which may be styled *benevolent*, the other *complacential*. The first is always our duty towards all men, let their general character, or their special treatment of us be what it may. The circumstance of their having greatly wronged us, or of their denying us Christian satisfaction, by no means dissolves or even lessens our obligation to forgive them so far, as to treat them with tender compassion, with cordial and active benevolence. But *complacential* forgiveness is not always our duty; that is, we are not always bound to restore or receive the offender to our bosom, as a Christian brother and friend; for the matter, spirit, or circumstances of his offence may be such, as to give us just apprehensions, that he is not a sincere Christian; or at least such, as to suspend his present right to Christian privileges; in which case we are obliged, by gospel rules, to withdraw our Christian confidence and fellowship from him, till by credible tokens of repentance he has restored himself to our broth-

erly charity. The want of accurate or serious attention to this distinction has occasioned great mistakes both in opinion and practice. Some, on the one hand, have indulged and justified, both in themselves and others, a spirit and conduct towards offenders, directly contrary to humane and Christian good will, upon the plea, that these persons have injured or have justly offended them, without duly confessing or repairing the wrong, and therefore, that they are under no obligation to forgive them. Others, on the contrary, have imbibed such lax, or as they choose to term it, such liberal notions of Christian candour, forgiveness, and charity, that they are for extending them to almost all characters indiscriminately: they seem disposed to tolerate, or at least connive at considerable and repeated irregularities in their brethren, rather than exercise the rigid and painful discipline of private reproof and public censure: they plead, that our divine Master commands us to forgive an offending brother not only seven times, but seventy times seven, and that, if he trespass against us seven times in a day, and only say, *I repent*, we are directed to receive him to our charity; that is, say these interpreters, we are to set no bounds to the expressions of our Christian lenity and forgiveness towards the errors and imperfections of our brethren. But have these indulgent critics observed, that the last of their favourite texts expressly limits the tokens of our charity, by suspending them on this condition, *if he turn again unto thee, and say, I repent.* By the offender's *turning again unto us* is meant his changing his disagreeable conduct, and turning back to us with evident contrition and desire of reconcilement: accordingly, the phrase of *turning* or *returning to the Lord* is frequently used for cordial repentance of sin, and reconciliation to God. By his

*saying*, *I repent*, is doubtless meant an apparently sincere or credible exhibition of repentance; otherwise he only adds insult to his offence, and thus involves himself in still greater scandal. On the whole, our Saviour in this text is expressly speaking of a Christian brother; that is, one who in the main appears a real Christian. He supposes him to *trespass seven times in a day*, that is, to be often surprised by natural temper, by the remaining force of old vicious habit, or by pressing outward temptation, into such deviations from duty, as are evidently contrary to his ruling disposition and character. He quickly recollects himself, laments his sin, voluntarily turns about, and confesses it to his offended fellow Christian with natural marks of evangelical penitence. In this case it is agreed on all sides, that he becomes entitled to our brotherly charity and communion, as though he had never offended. But there are many supposeable, yea actual instances of offence, which essentially differ from this in some and perhaps in all the particulars just stated. As such instances do not fall within this rule of our Saviour; of course the guilty offender can claim only our tender compassion and benevolence, but have no title to our peculiar Christian esteem and fellowship.

Having defined the nature of forgiving our debtors, let us briefly advert to its *obligation* and *importance*. These are strikingly intimated in the petition before us. For here we urge this plea for divine forgiveness, and take this encouragement to expect it, that we feel a disposition to forgive others. The particle *as* used by Matthew is a note of similitude, not of equality; and implies, that we ought in this respect to resemble the divine benevolence and mercy; and the particle *for* used by Luke is not casual, but demonstrative; it is not a plea of merit, as though our forgiving others were a

deserving reason of God's forgiving us; but a plea of grace, implying a humble assurance of his pardoning mercy, arising from the consciousness that his Spirit has formed us to a godlike, forgiving temper. It therefore imports, that the exercise of such a temper is at once our important duty, and a necessary and certain evidence of our gracious state. Agreeably, the importance of this temper is inculcated by the whole tenor of the gospel. This spirit is emphatically the very genius of Christianity: it breathes through its peculiar doctrines, precepts, institutions, examples, and motives. It is eminently enforced by the views, which the gospel gives of the abounding mercy of God, and of the life and death, the mediatorial undertaking and redemption of his Son Jesus Christ, especially of the import of his last sufferings, and his dying prayer for his murderers; "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." When we further consider, that an unforgiving and revengeful spirit is very mean and odious in itself, and unspeakably tormenting to its unhappy subjects; that it violates those principles of mutual equity and brotherhood, which bind men together; that it unfits them for the right performance both of religious, social, and personal duties, lays them open to a thousand temptations, proves them to be Satan's children, and in fine, that it naturally as well, as by the positive decree of God, bars men from final happiness, and subjects them to endless misery; when we duly weigh these particulars, we must see the duty in question to be infinitely important.

I must add, that there is a peculiar propriety in exercising this spirit towards others, when we solemnly ask divine forgiveness for ourselves: For if we properly feel the greatness of those sins against the infinite

God, which we request him to pardon; it will make the offences of our fellow worms against us appear inexpressibly small. And can we with any face ask him to forgive us ten thousand talents, if we will not forgive a fellow servant an hundred pence? Must not a due sense of that transcendent guilt in ourselves, the pardon of which we implore, in a great measure annihilate, and make us easily forget the petty wrongs which others have done to us? Especially when we add a just view of the greatness of God's forgiving mercy displayed in Jesus Christ. Has the infinite Being, whom I had unspeakably offended, has he in a manner equally unsolicited and undeserved sent his Son to purchase, his gospel to offer, and his Spirit to apply a generous and full pardon of all this guilt; and has he commanded me to show my gratitude to him for this infinite mercy by manifesting the same spirit towards my offending brother? And can I refuse so small a return of acknowledgment? O my soul, God freely forgave thee, when there was nothing to oblige or enforce, to merit or even desire it; and shall not I forgive my brother, who perhaps desires and claims my pardon? or if not, his Master and mine enjoins it. This frame of spirit towards others is likewise peculiarly suitable, when we pray for divine forgiveness, because it qualifies us to receive it; for it implies cordial friendship to the pardoning benevolence of Deity; it implies harmony of temper with him. In the exercise of this spirit the soul sees and relishes the beauty of God's infinite mercy. He loves mercy, loves to exercise it himself, and is pleased with the exercises of it in God; is delighted with the thought of being indebted to infinite mercy for his entire pardon and salvation. But the man, who has an unforgiving disposition, is unfit to receive divine forgiveness; for he is an enemy

to that very mercy which must forgive him; he cannot, therefore, sincerely ask, or warrantably expect a pardon from it. His temper and conduct towards others contradict and defeat his pretended prayers. Hence God cannot but abhor and utterly reject his petitions. This is strikingly represented in the parable of the debtor and creditor in the eighteenth of Matthew.

I may add, how can we go to God in prayer, and profess friendship to him, if we have no love to our brother? "He, who loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?" How can a man love the Father, and hate his children; be pleased with the character of a Being, who is infinitely merciful and forgiving, and yet be unmerciful and unforgiving to his fellow creatures? It appears, then, that a spirit of love, and consequently of forgiveness towards men, is the inseparable fruit and evidence of love to God; and it will be granted by all, that love to God is an important ingredient in prayer, particularly in our petitions for his pardoning mercy. Certainly such petitions ought to flow from a heart friendly to God and his law, disposed to justify and exalt him, and to take all the blame and shame of sin to itself. At the same time, it will not follow, that the convicted, distressed sinner, who is conscious of the want of this pious affection to God, or the humble Christian, who fears he is destitute of it, has no encouragement to pray for divine forgiveness; for the former may feel this want of holy love to be a great and dangerous sin, and as such may confess and lament it before God with at least as much sincerity, as he can mention it to an earthly friend; nor can I find, that such confession and corresponding petition, which are really prompted by the Spirit of God, are forbidden or discouraged in his word: and such a sinner may beg

pardon from God without feeling at the time such an unforgiving frame of mind towards men, as would render his prayer an abomination. With respect to the doubting Christian, he can at least sincerely adopt the acceptable petition of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

On the whole, when we rightly use this plea for divine forgiveness, *as we forgive our debtors;* we heartily subscribe to that divine constitution, which suspends our pardon from God on this condition; at the same time we feel, that this act of forgiving others is so reasonable a duty, and so imperfectly performed, that it gives us no meritorious title to the blessing we ask; and likewise, that it is not an adequate pattern or measure of this blessing; for we too often find, that our exercises of forgiveness are mingled with pride, resentment, grudging, aversion; but we need and desire from God a free, full, frequent, perpetual remission. We likewise realize and cordially acquiesce in the righteous and good providence of God in permitting any of our fellow men or Christians to injure and chastise us, and cheerfully trust, that he will bless this affliction for our good. Thus David felt under the curses of Shimei. We also plead and confide in those many free and rich promises, which God has made to merciful characters. We view the forgiving spirit, with which he has inspired us, as a proof of our possessing the spirit of Christ, and of our consequent title by the gospel covenant to pardon, acceptance, and eternal life.

In reviewing this subject we are led to admire the transcendent superiority of our religion to all other systems, and in particular, the comprehensive and excellent spirit of the Lord's prayer, especially in the instance before us. While haughty and malignant revenge is

consecrated, as a virtue, by other schemes of morality and honour; the gospel carries forgiveness and beneficence towards enemies to a most glorious height, and enforces them by the most winning and commanding motives! How worthy is such a religion of a benevolent Deity! How friendly to the peace, dignity, and happiness of his rational offspring? How wisely and efficaciously does the prayer before us engage us to the practice of mutual forgiveness, by making it our daily plea for as well as the express condition of divine pardon!

Let us all seriously examine whether we possess the spirit of this petition, a spirit of humble penitence, of evangelical trust, of cordial charity and forgiveness. Can we readily forgive the most injurious and malicious human creature so as to cherish towards him unfeigned benevolence and compassion; so as cheerfully to assist and comfort him in want or distress, and heartily seek and rejoice in his amendment and prosperity? Or do we cherish a resentful, bitter, vindictive spirit, which takes pleasure in reporting and magnifying his faults, in wounding his reputation and peace, and which cannot be easy without retaliating the injury? If the latter be our character, it merits our solemn consideration, that we are not only condemned by the whole spirit and letter of the gospel, but that we cannot repeat the Lord's prayer without virtually imprecating upon ourselves the vengeance of Heaven; for in the petition of our text we implicitly ask God to treat us, as we treat our fellow creatures; we solemnly profess our desire to stand or fall by this rule; consequently, the unmerciful, implacable petitioner constructively prays, that God would be implacable towards him, that he would pursue him with his perpetual hatred and curse! What an awful reflection! May it have its due effect on those fashionable Christians, and

pretenders to honour, who think it noble to revenge, and ignominious to overlook an affront! With what face can such men call themselves Christians, or attempt to offer up their prayers and thanksgivings for the infinite mercy of God and the Redeemer, or presume to hope for their own final pardon and salvation! Let all of this character, and every soul in this assembly, seriously ponder those words of our Lord—"If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

# Sermon XXIV.

## On the Connexion between denying the Son and denying the Father.

1 John ii. 23.

*Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but he that acknowledgeth the Son, hath the Father also.*

THIS first epistle of John, which is called his *general* epistle, that is, his circular letter to the churches at large, was intended to confirm them in a stedfast adherence to the true principles and practice of Christianity, especially to those great doctrines, which respect the person and office of Jesus Christ. These leading truths of the gospel were, it seems, early opposed by corrupt and seducing teachers, whom our apostle calls liars and antichrists, because they vented the most shocking and pernicious falsehoods against Christ and his religion. In the verse preceding the text he tells us, that these antichrists denied both the Father and the Son; that is, by opposing Christ in his true character and doctrine, they denied the testimony of the Father concerning him, and opposed the character and will of God, as perfectly revealed in and by his Son, who is his best, his most glorious image and messenger. Hence he justly infers, in the words before us, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but he that acknowledgeth the Son, hath the Father also." As if he had said, He who denies Christ,

or the peculiarities of his gospel, has no true and saving knowledge of or interest in God; he has no friendship even to natural religion; he is an atheist in his secret disposition, if not in his open profession and practice. But he, who sincerely acknowledges the Son, honours and pleases the Father also; for there is such a perfect union between God and his Son, between the religion of nature and the gospel, that a hearty friendship to one implies and promotes an equal affection to the other.

The words thus explained will lead us to show at large the intimate connexion between deism and atheism on the one hand, and on the other between a true belief and acknowledgment of Christ and his gospel, and a sincere respect to God the Father.

A subject of this kind is not only adapted to a sacramental occasion, which calls many of us to an open, renewed acknowledgment of the Son of God, but is also eminently suited to the present alarming state of the Christian world, and particularly of our own country, which is remarkable for the increase both of speculative and practical infidelity; an infidelity, which pours explicit or implied contempt on the great Redeemer of the world, or at least on the most essential truths and precepts of his gospel. It therefore highly becomes the professed friends, and especially the public teachers of Christianity, to contribute their utmost to repel and destroy this common enemy of God and man, and to strengthen themselves and their surrounding connexions in a firm attachment to the principles and duties of our holy religion. To promote this great end is, indeed, the main design, not only of the Lord's supper, but of all public Christian institutions. Perhaps this end cannot be better promoted than by a serious attention to the subject before us; a subject, which places in the most awful

and striking view the importance of a hearty and resolute acknowledgment of Christ, and the transcendent guilt and misery of denying him.

The justness of this representation will appear, if we consider the following particulars :

First. The gospel of Christ gives us the best account of the character and government of the true God, and of all those doctrines and duties, which are usually styled natural religion. Consequently, whoever heartily believes in God, and is a friend to rational piety and virtue, must reverence and delight in the gospel of Christ ; and on the contrary, whoever hates or denies the latter, proclaims himself an enemy to the former. The religion of Jesus unfolds, confirms, and improves those great principles of piety and morality, which respect both the existence, perfections, and providence of one Supreme Being, and the origin, duty, and expectations of man, his reasonable creature. It teaches the essential difference, the true nature, the wide extent, and everlasting rewards both of virtue and vice. It inculcates, and carries to the highest pitch of perfection, every branch of moral goodness, whether personal, social, or divine. In short, it reflects the brightest glory upon the nature and administration of God, and is admirably fitted to ennoble and perfect the character of man. Agreeably, it is a notorious fact, that the most weak and ignorant disciples of Christ have far more just, comprehensive, and elevated conceptions of a Supreme Being, and of every religious and moral subject, than the most profound and learned sages of the heathen world have ever attained. It is equally evident, that the dispositions, manners, and real enjoyments of Christian believers have been refined and improved in proportion to their serious regard to the great doctrines, requirements, and motives

of the gospel. Even the enemies of our religion are in general unspeakably indebted to early Christian education and habit, and to those public institutions, sentiments, and manners, which revelation has founded and supported. From these sources many deists in Christian countries evidently derive that degree of religious knowledge, of moral restraint and improvement, of private and social happiness, by which they are distinguished from ancient and modern heathens.

Do not these observations clearly evince, that the gospel of Christ is a very important friend, yea, is the main support of natural religion and virtue? Must not, then, every sincere believer and promoter of the latter be disposed to embrace and propagate the belief and practice of the former? Must not every real and devout friend of the one true God rejoice in an institution, which places his character, providence, and worship, and the way to please and enjoy him, in a light so plain, so satisfactory, and honourable? Must not every lover of virtue wish to guard and promote its interests both in himself and others, by those high precepts and motives, which the gospel presents? In short, will not every true patriot and philanthropist desire to bless his country and the world by diffusing as widely as possible the beneficent influence of Christian principles and virtues? Must we not hence conclude, that "he who denies the Son hath not the Father;" that he, who rejects the great Representative, the benevolent Ambassador of God to men, is unfriendly to God himself; that he, who resists the abundant evidence, the excellent doctrine and spirit of Christianity, does in his heart oppose the similar proofs and doctrines of natural religion? A man must first determine to *live* like an atheist; he must possess such feelings and habits, as rebel against the authority and com-

mands of God; he must make it necessary to his interest and comfort, that there should be no such Deity or future retribution, as the Bible reveals, before he can renounce and malignantly oppose the Christian system. Accordingly, the infidelity of the present day has, in many instances, assumed the consistent form of complete and avowed atheism; while, in other instances, it has questioned or exploded some of the most essential principles and motives of rational piety and morals; at best, its votaries have not been such devout and virtuous characters, such candid, serious, and diligent inquirers after truth, as even the light of nature taught them to be. No wonder, that such enemies to God and to virtue should oppose such a system, as Christianity; nor is it strange, that they, who reject the gospel, which is the grand prop of sound religion and morality, should sink into all the darkness and profligacy of atheism.

Secondly. The truth of our text will still further appear, if we view the gospel not only, as a publication and enforcement of the religion of nature, but, as a *new dispensation of grace*, which is carrying on by the Son and Spirit of God for the restoration of an apostate and ruined world. In this view, Christianity is a glorious, supernatural scheme of truth and duty, which reason and nature, in their highest improvements, could never have investigated. It is true, that nature, conscious of guilt, and apprehending the displeasure of a wise, holy, and justly offended Lawgiver and Judge, might feel the want, and cherish the trembling hope of some such merciful interposition, as revelation unfolds. But it is the gospel of Christ alone, which assures us of an actual scheme of reconcilement, in all respects adapted to the wants and wishes of nature. The gospel only gives us

such discoveries of God, as are fitted to encourage the repentance, and engage the filial love and cheerful obedience of conscious offenders. The doctrine of Christ exhibits the Deity to our view in the full orbed lustre of his wisdom, purity, justice, and mercy, harmoniously uniting, yea, gloriously triumphing in the pardon and salvation of the penitent sinner. This knowledge of a reconcileable, forgiving God is very important in the religion of a fallen creature. But the light of nature could give us no satisfaction on this point; it could not discover how far and in what way the pardon of transgressors might consist with the honour and good pleasure of our offended Sovereign, and with the general safety and welfare of his moral subjects.

If then we believe in God, as our Supreme Ruler and Judge, who is justly displeased with our transgressions, and at the same time are friends to his perfect but injured government and law; shall we not gladly believe in his Son Jesus Christ, who came to inform us, that this offended and majestic Being is still ready to pardon and bless us in the way of humble repentance; that on this condition he can and will receive us to favour, consistently with his own dignity and the general good? If we believe in and adore God, as a Being infinitely perfect and glorious, can we fail to believe in and to honour his Son, who is the brightness of that glory, who is the visible and perfect image of the invisible Deity, and in whose face the glory of the Godhead shines with a mollified and endearing lustre? Shall we not rejoice to hear, that the high and lofty One, whom nature awfully contemplates, as infinitely above us, has come down to us in the person of his Son, has united himself to our nature, assumed a personal and bodily form, and thus presented himself to our view in the most near, famil-

iar, and engaging attitude; so that we can now say with an exulting voice, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them;" yea, God himself, in the person of his Son, shall be sensibly with them, and be their God. When by faith "we come to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant," in whom God and man are brought together, we hereby come to "God the Judge of all," and thus have the most comforting advantages for knowing and imitating his perfect character, for enjoying his friendly presence and intercourse.

I cannot help stopping in this place to reflect more particularly on the transcendent excellency of the gospel in this respect, compared with the light of nature and reason. The bare volume of nature gives us only the idea of a glorious, mysterious power diffused through and animating the universe; but in contemplating this power, the mind acquires no distinct view of a proper person, possessing a definite moral character; but it rather loses itself in a confused, unintelligible, abstract idea, which it styles nature, the laws and powers of matter and motion, or the soul of the world. But the gospel, by holding up distinctly to our view the person and actions of Jesus Christ, as the visible representative of Deity, collects our scattered and confused ideas to one definite and luminous point; it fixes our views, not on an unintelligible phantom, which modern philosophists call nature, but upon a real and divinely glorious person; and thus brings our wandering thoughts and affections to rest in their proper centre, in the knowledge, worship, and resemblance of the one true God manifested in the person of his Son.

While the perfections and will of God are thus brought down to us in the person, doctrine, and actions

of the divine Saviour; his *mediation* and *atoning sacrifice* render it safe and honourable for the Supreme Ruler to remit our offences, and restore us to his favour. This doctrine of the mediatorial obedience and sufferings of an innocent and glorious Person for the benefit of the guilty, is not only a conspicuous feature in the gospel plan, but highly approves itself to those, who have right apprehensions of God and themselves, and of the general constitution of nature and providence. A just impression of the moral character and government of Deity, of what he owes to himself and his dominions, of our own guilty rebellion against him, and the consequent marks of his displeasure, felt or apprehended, will make us feel the importance of some Mediator and atonement, to conciliate his forfeited favour. Upon this basis has been founded the general practice of propitiatory oblations in the Gentile world, and especially the priesthood and sacrifices as well, as principal predictions and promises, of the Jewish dispensation. Indeed, the general series of events, both in the natural and moral world, which is produced by the mediation of secondary causes or agents, is a constant illustration of the mediatorial scheme of the gospel. Mediators or middle persons are the constant instruments of good and evil to mankind. Thus parents are the great mediums of good or ill to their dependent offspring. Yea, the innocent are daily appointed to suffer for the faults and the benefit of the guilty. It becomes, in many cases, our indispensable duty to interpose, and at the expense of great labour and suffering on our part, to rescue others from difficulties, into which their own follies and vices had plunged them, in defiance perhaps of our best admonitions and examples. In this way virtuous parents often become great, yea, the principal sufferers by the misconduct of

their children; and virtuous children by the vices of their parents. Vicarious punishment then, or the sufferings of the innocent for the guilty, is a divine constitution, notified to us by daily experience.

If therefore we believe in God, as really and justly ordering things in this manner, in the general course of his providence; shall we not believe the propriety and reality of a similar, though far more illustrious instance of mediation and vicarious suffering, exhibited in the gospel, the truth and importance of which are so amply attested; and which, indeed, is explicitly interwoven with the whole scheme of Christianity, and is supported by the same proofs with the system at large? Shall we not gladly receive, and even triumph in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, when we have such evidence, that God himself has appointed and accepted it, and when our own situation and feelings, as guilty, obnoxious offenders, concur with the general sense of mankind in eagerly looking and crying for such an expedient? Shall our ungrateful and foolish pride spurn the benefit of this atonement, merely because we cannot comprehend all the reasons and ends of its appointment, or the precise manner in which it procures our forgiveness? Shall we dare, with atheistical blasphemers, to reproach this contrivance, as absurd and unjust, merely because it holds up God the Father, as subjecting his meritorious and beloved Son to torment and death in the room of guilty mankind? Does not this reproach equally implicate the known and common proceedings of divine providence? Is it not completely obviated by the voluntary consent of the Son of God to these vicarious sufferings, and the consequent glorious reward, which he received for enduring them?

While the gospel thus provides a complete atonement and pardon for our guilt, it offers and communicates the

*sanctifying and comforting Spirit*, to purify and strengthen our natures, depraved and enfeebled by sin, and to restore them to moral rectitude and tranquillity. If we have just views of God and ourselves, we must see, that our true perfection and happiness consist in resembling and enjoying him; and that our minds, antecedently to the renewing grace of the gospel, are strangely alienated from and indisposed to this resemblance and enjoyment. Even some of the wiser heathens felt and acknowledged this degeneracy of human nature, and their need of supernatural aid to restore them to virtue and happiness. Shall we not then highly prize and joyfully embrace that divine Redeemer, "who of God is made unto us, not only wisdom and righteousness, but sanctification;" who makes us "willing in the day of his power," and who sends the promised Comforter to dwell in the hearts of his people, as a perpetual spring of holiness and joy? If we acknowledge God, as the prime Efficient, even in our common actions and enjoyments, shall we proudly disown our dependence on his gracious influence for those unspeakably greater blessings, which are implied in a truly virtuous and happy state of our souls? Shall we reject or ridicule the offered grace of the Holy Spirit, merely because we cannot comprehend the mode of his operation; when we are confessedly ignorant of the manner of divine agency in the world of nature? If we deny the doctrine of divine influences in the kingdom of grace, do we not virtually deny it in the kingdom of providence? And does not this denial imply or betray an atheistical spirit?

Further. If we believe in God, as the Father of our spirits, which must shortly return to him that gave them; if we believe, upon the footing of reason, that he has destined us for another and everlasting world; we

shall gladly believe in One, who will give us certain information of that unknown region; who will undertake to guide us to it; who will stand our friend in the last decisive trial, and secure our acquittance and happiness in the state of retribution.

How very poor is the most refined system of pagan philosophy, or of modern infidelity, compared with the divine philosophy of the Bible! What noble sentiments and exalted consolations does the latter inspire in the most trying and distressful situations! What was the boasted patience and fortitude of ancient stoics and recent unbelievers amidst the evils of life, the agonies of death, or the anguish of bereavement? What but an inhuman and gloomy apathy, founded in the extinction of the best feelings of the heart, and incapacity of supporting it in seasons of extremity! But Christianity, far from suppressing, accommodates itself to our natural sensibilities; it permits and regulates, it sooths and refines our tender passions under afflictive events, while it improves these events, and the sorrow they produce, as fresh and powerful means of promoting both our present virtue and future bliss. Should we not then welcome to our hearts that divine religion, which provides a sovereign balm for every wound; which consoles bleeding friendship and love under the dissolution of the tenderest connexions; which softens the pillow of sickness and death even to the most timid and feeble of its votaries; which has enabled thousands of Christians, of every age, sex, and condition to triumph over the last enemy, even in its most terrible forms—"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

# Sermon XXV.

## Religion the one Thing needful.*

LUKE x. 42.

*But one thing is needful.*

WHEN our Lord uttered these words, he was on a visit to an amiable family, consisting of Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, each of whom was a devoted and beloved friend of Jesus Christ. On this occasion, however, the two sisters honoured their divine Guest in very different modes. Mary, throwing aside every worldly concern, gave herself up to his improving conversation. She "sat at his feet," in the usual posture of a disciple, "and heard his word." But the elder sister, anxious to provide an entertainment worthy of so illustrious a Person, encumbered herself with unseasonable and excessive care; and in the hurry of business came to Jesus with a peevish complaint against Mary for sitting idle at so pressing a time; which complaint is so expressed, as to implicate Christ himself. "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me." We must be permitted to observe here, that those persons give not the best kind of welcome to the visits of their friends, who, like this good woman, appear anxious, troubled,

* This was the last sermon, which Dr. Tappan preached. It was delivered to the Christian society in Brattle street, Boston, August 7, 1803. He expired on the twenty-seventh of the same month.

or mortified on the subject of entertaining them, whatever kindness or respect may be the ground of this appearance.

Our Lord, in the words which include our text, reproves this immoderate carefulness. "And Jesus answered and said, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." As the "many things," which at this time unduly occupied the attention of one sister, are here opposed to "the one thing" declared to be exclusively "needful," and to "the good part" chosen by the other, and which could not be taken from her; we may certainly conclude, that this "one thing" means RELIGION, or the predominant care of the soul, as opposed to those multiplied earthly solicitudes, which engross and distract the children of this world, and which sometimes vex and defile even the best of Christians.

I propose therefore in the following discourse to illustrate and enforce this great truth, *that religion is the one thing necessary.*

By religion we intend a supreme regard to God and duty, or a prevailing concern for our own eternal salvation. These two ideas cannot be separated; for as God wills our final happiness in the way of holiness, so by properly seeking our own salvation we effectually please, obey, and honour our Creator; and on the other hand, so far, as we devote ourselves to him, we necessarily secure and enjoy the highest felicity. Accordingly, to glorify God and enjoy him forever constitutes the one chief business and happiness of man. I would further remark, that, though religion is made up of many different parts, which respect a great variety of actions, objects, and ends, yet it is justly denominated *one thing;*

because these several parts, far from interfering with each other, like the different passions and pursuits of the worldly man, are harmoniously connected. They mutually beget or improve each other, and go to constitute one beautiful and perfect whole. Thus the piety and morality, the internal holiness and external obedience of the good man are but one thing under different names and modifications: for they all have one origin, viz. the Spirit of God; they flow from one principle, viz. an upright heart; they produce one general effect, the growing virtue and peace of their possessor; they are offered to and accepted by the Deity through one Mediator, Jesus Christ; they seek and finally terminate in the same great ends, the glory of God and the highest happiness of man. We may add, that, where true piety prevails, it sanctifies even the natural affections, the innocent acquired habits, and all the civil actions and enjoyments of its subject, and renders them so many instruments or branches of religion; insomuch, that the real Christian, "whatever he does, in word or deed, does all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, he does all to the glory of God." In short, all his views, exercises, and pleasures are consecrated, limited, or subdued by one all-pervading, all controlling principle of rectitude.

As religion is thus but *one thing*, so it may be justly styled the *one thing needful;* because it is necessary in a sense, which is absolute, transcendent, and universal. When we contemplate the necessity of religion, so many arguments rush upon our minds, that we scarcely know where to begin, or where to end.

In the FIRST place, the importance of religion appears from a consideration of that Being, who is its principal

object. True piety is chiefly employed in knowing and loving, in resembling and honouring the Deity; in receiving and reflecting his moral glory. As the moral rectitude of Jehovah is the sum and crown of his infinite excellence, so vital religion is a living copy, a visible though imperfect display of this divine excellence. Hence it is called the image and life of God, a participation of his nature, a showing forth of his virtues and praises: the subject of it is said to be one with God, to co-operate and have fellowship with him, to be filled with his fulness, and to enter into his joy. What beauty, dignity, and happiness do these expressions convey! How inconceivably important then is religion, which unites man to Deity; which renders him the image and the instrument of his glory, and thus directly promotes the chief end of our being! The man, who is a stranger to religion, lives without God in the world; he robs his Maker of that honour, and himself of that perfection, for which his reasonable nature was chiefly designed. This leads us to observe,

II. That the necessity of religion further appears from the *nature and value of the human soul.* The pre-eminence of man above the brutes lies in the powers and capacities of his mind. Now religion directs these powers to their proper objects; it at once enlarges and fills these capacities. It strengthens and satisfies the understanding with that divine knowledge, which is its noblest food and entertainment. It purifies and regulates the will. It harmonizes, exalts, and gratifies the affections. It relieves and solaces the wounded conscience. It inspires that inward peace, which is the sunshine of the soul, and the dawn of heaven.

But without religion the soul cannot enjoy peace, and of course the man cannot be happy. For happiness or

misery flows not so much from exterior circumstances, as from the internal state of the mind. Now a rational mind, which feels no love to its infinite Creator and Benefactor, no delight in the Supreme Good, no confidence in the favour of Him, on whom its eternal fate depends, must be inwardly poor and wretched, though surrounded with all the sources of earthly felicity. Such a creature must feel himself in an unnatural, distempered, and therefore painful condition. He must feel the torture of desires unsatisfied, of faculties prostituted, of hopes disappointed; of passions at once contradictory, clamorous, and unbounded; he must, whenever he soberly reflects, endure the anguish and terror, inflicted by an upbraiding conscience and a frowning God. His only refuge from this anguish is in thoughtless dissipation, or in a rapid succession of worldly pursuits and indulgences. But this refuge forsakes him in the gloomy intervals of solitude, of external danger and distress, and especially on the bed of death. The honest and great teacher, death, gives new light and activity to his reflecting powers; it brings into lively view his God dishonoured and incensed, his Redeemer insulted, his soul neglected and ruined, his fellow men, and even his dearest friends, corrupted, and perhaps destroyed by his criminal example, principles, or unfaithfulness. To complete this picture of wo, the hand of death separates him forever from those worldly objects, to which all his affections, habits, and pleasures were attached. At the same time it excludes him from the beatific presence of that Being, who only could make him happy; or rather his own confirmed depravity renders him incapable of sharing in the pure and refined enjoyments of the invisible world, and of course subjects him to extreme and hopeless misery. Thus sound reason and experience

as well, as revelation, assure us, that a creature so formed and destined, as the human soul, cannot be happy in any possible circumstances, but must be exceedingly wretched, without religion; and of course, that this is the one thing necessary. This argument is greatly strengthened when we add,

III. That the Bible holds up the importance of religion in the most impressive light, by revealing the wonderful methods, which the Most High has employed to restore and preserve it in our degenerate world. Indeed the whole system, both of revelation and providence, respecting mankind, has been directed to this object. For this, prophets and apostles preached and wrote. For this, kings and empires have been exalted, shaken, and destroyed. For this, the church of God and its sacred institutions were early established, and have been wonderfully supported. For this, the Son of God descended from heaven to a manger and a cross, to recover fallen man to true religion, and thus raise him to everlasting happiness. The divine Saviour taught and laboured, obeyed and died, rose and ascended, and still employs his interceding, ruling, and saving power. In a word, the scriptures represent the work of redemption, as the greatest effort of infinite wisdom and love; and they constantly represent this work, as having for its object the restoration of our souls from the ruins of sin to holiness and glory. How transcendently necessary and valuable must have been that object, on which infinite benevolence and wisdom have thus lavished their treasures! How precious the human soul, for which heaven itself has paid such a price! How is man ennobled, how is religion exalted, by such a mighty apparatus employed in their favour! What an awful and endearing bond does this impose on redeemed men to value their own

souls, to seek their recovery to holiness and happiness, as the one thing needful! How unspeakably does it enhance the guilt and condemnation of those, who oppose that religion, who despise that salvation, which are thus recommended to and urged upon them by the blood of the Son of God! How can we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!

IV. Religion is the one thing needful, because it is of *universal* necessity. It is equally necessary for all men, yea, for all rational creatures in the universe. Religion essentially consists in love to God and fellow beings, expressed in every suitable way. Now this is equally the duty and the happiness of *all* classes of intelligences. It is as necessary for angels, as for men; this constitutes the chief beauty and felicity of celestial spirits, as distinguished from malignant and miserable demons. This was the glory and bliss of man in Paradise; and the recovery and exercise of this spirit are the main duty and interest of man since his apostasy. In other words, the general duty of men is always necessarily the same, though the particular expressions or instruments of it may considerably vary. Thus, after the fall, repentance of sin, faith in a Mediator, and certain outward symbols, as signs and means of religion, became proper and needful, which were not suitable or necessary for innocent man. So the peculiar circumstances and genius of the Jewish nation rendered many ceremonial observances expedient for them, which are totally improper under the Christian dispensation. Yet still the same general spirit and practice are required amid all this variety of circumstances and modes. The strictest observance of the Mosaic rites was of no avail any further, than it expressed and promoted substantial virtue and piety. Nor is the most zealous regard to the

peculiar doctrines and institutions of the gospel of any significancy, unless it produce and nourish a holy temper and conduct.

As vital religion is thus necessary for men under every dispensation, so it is equally essential in all their civil and worldly employments, in all the relations, which they bear to human society. Whether they move in a higher or lower sphere, whether they pursue an active or a contemplative life, they are equally the creatures and subjects of God, and in this view are equally bound to practise every moral and religious duty. The more exalted their stations are, the more need they have of a pious principle to prevent the abuse of worldly greatness; to secure a sober estimate, a temperate enjoyment, a diligent and beneficent improvement of it; to make them constantly feel the high duty and responsibility attached to it; and thus to render their useful examples and efforts in some measure equal to their extensive powers and opportunities. On these accounts the obligation and necessity of religion to public officers, civil as well, as ecclesiastical, are preeminently great; and the inconsistency of a free, well informed, and Christian people in electing men to high stations, who are not faithful to themselves and their God, can hardly be expressed. The ministers of the commonwealth ought certainly to co-operate with those of the church, in promoting the greatest good of the community; but how can this be expected, if religion be not the governing principle of both! I need not insist on the importance of real and exemplary sanctity in Christian instructors, because you instantly perceive the absurdity and mischief of a man's teaching and enforcing upon others what he does not heartily believe and practise himself; and because you will readily allow, that personal piety in a minister is at

once the best recommendation of it to others, and the best pledge of his pastoral fidelity and success.

We might go on to observe, that religion is likewise necessary in domestic life. It is important, both to secure and exalt the reciprocal affections, virtues, and satisfactions of the conjugal, parental, and filial relations. It is needful to restrain parents from relaxing their just authority by indolence or extreme indulgence, and from abusing it, by passionate and brutal severity. It is necessary to insure that sober and pious education of children, on which individual, domestic, and public happiness essentially depends. It is necessary to render private families the props of the church and commonwealth, and nurseries for heaven. That spirit, which religion inspires, will make superiors condescending and beneficent; equals, courteous and obliging; inferiors, respectful and submissive. It will form men into good neighbours, faithful friends, orderly citizens, and useful patriots. The pious man, who acts from principle, will be far more correct and uniform, diligent and resolute, in performing the duties of every situation, than persons of a different character. He will be directed by the best motives, both in the choice and prosecution of his particular calling. His great and conscientious inquiry will be, in what employment can I best serve God and man, and promote my own everlasting well being. As he sets out in the career of life with these views, so his after progress, being guided and animated by them, will, under the promised favour of Heaven, be safe and comfortable, diligent and prosperous, respectable and useful. Since then religion is so important to every rank, relation, and business, it may well be styled *the one thing needful*. Other accom-

plishments may be severally necessary to particular employments; but this is alike beneficial to all.

As this qualification is indispensable to every occupation, so it is needful in every condition and vicissitude of life. If we exult in outward health and prosperity, how necessary is a religious principle to the true enjoyment and the right improvement of such a state! How necessary to keep us in the middle path between sordid avarice and wanton prodigality! How often does worldly wealth destroy the virtue, the comfort, the usefulness, and the final happiness of its possessors, by nourishing a proud and unfeeling, an anxious and craving, a carnal and irreligious spirit! Nothing but deep rooted piety is an effectual preservative from these evils. This, and this only, will extract the good, without the poison, of earthly enjoyments. This will produce a sentimental and refined relish of these comforts, and at the same time, a virtuous and beneficent application of them; which gives to the possessor the noblest satisfaction they are fitted to impart. Agreeably, the wisest of men has told us, that "God giveth to a man, that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy;" wisdom and knowledge to regulate his desire, fruition, and improvement of temporal blessings; and joy, as the fruit and reward of his wise regulations: "but to the sinner he giveth travail to gather and to heap up," without any power to enjoy, or to do good with his treasures. "This," Solomon justly adds, "is vanity and vexation of spirit."

If we reverse the scene, and contemplate the child of poverty and distress, how needful is religion to sustain, to sooth, and to sanctify his afflicted state! When the world frowns upon him on every side, from what source

can he derive comfort, but from the smiles of conscience and of Heaven, from a pious resignation to, and trust in the providence of God, and the hope of eternal glory, as the recompense of his momentary sufferings, patiently endured and rightly improved? Those troubles, which crush the spirits of the wicked, give new lustre and triumph to the man of religion, by displaying the efficacy of pious principles in blunting the darts of adversity, and converting them into instruments of holiness and joy.

We may add here, religion is eminently needful to inspire equanimity amid those sudden changes of condition, to which we are constantly exposed; to keep our minds humble and temperate, when we are hastily exalted from a poor, calamitous state, to affluence, ease, or celebrity; and to give us fortitude and submission, when unexpectedly visited with the reverse. In short, piety must be our continual pilot and anchor, both to steer our course through the uncertain voyage of life, and enable us to out ride the storms, which assail it. This leads us to subjoin,

That the preeminence of religion further appears from its importance at all seasons. To every thing else, as the wise man tells us, there are appropriate seasons; but this is always seasonable, and therefore always beautiful and necessary. A professor of piety must never sacrifice his religion to any company, business, or amusement; he must appear always adorned with it; he must be in the fear of the Lord all the day long; he must rejoice in God always; he must pray and give thanks without ceasing; he must do every thing to the glory of God; that is, a pious habit and

frame of spirit, a readiness for duty, a prevailing desire to please God and profit men, must never be suspended. This must regulate and sanctify his worldly business, his social duties, and even his cheerful relaxations. Unless this be our habitual aim, we contradict the great end, for which time and existence were given us.

This observation introduces another, which is, that religion is necessary for every stage of life, from early childhood to grey hairs. The youngest human being must have the seeds of this heavenly temper, in order to qualify him for the heavenly felicity. You, who are in the bloom of childhood, or of youth, need this principle to guard you against the numberless temptations to folly and sin, which constantly surround you. You need it to improve those inward accomplishments, exterior manners, and innocent pleasures, which become your period of life. You need it, as the great preparative for a useful manhood, a comfortable old age, and a peaceful death. It is needful for persons of mature years to moderate, to sanctify, and to prosper the worldly cares, pursuits, and enjoyments of manly life. It is needful for advanced age, to lighten its burdens, to give dignity to the hoary head, to compensate and sooth the decay of animal life, and its pleasures, with the hope of immortal vigour and undecaying pleasure at God's right hand.

Which brings us to remark in the LAST place, that religion is necessary for *both worlds*; while other things are needful in a sense, which is merely local and temporary. When we call food and raiment, and comfortable habitations necessaries of life, we use a dialect, which belongs only to the animal part and the infantile state of

man; for these things are so far from being essential to him, when arrived at his true perfection, that their necessity and use will then forever cease; yea, he must drop these badges and fetters of childhood, before he can enjoy matured freedom and happiness; before he can rise to those noble and everlasting joys, for which his nature is designed. Did we, my brethren, fully realize these truths, we should hardly apply the term *necessary* to any thing, but that, which directly promotes our ultimate perfection and blessedness. Now what can this be, but religion? This and this only assimilates us to God and superior beings, and of course renders us capable of sharing their society and blessedness. It is the voice of reason as well, as revelation: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." But "blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

As the preceding discourse has been wholly practical, and has aimed to bring home the importance of true piety to every one's conscience, there is no necessity, nor indeed time, for a formal application. Otherwise we might lament the folly, depravity, and wretchedness of those, who openly despise, or carelessly neglect the one thing needful. If there could be grief in heaven, angels would weep at such a spectacle. We might congratulate those, who, having chosen and secured the good part, have no occasion for anxious concern about any thing else. But I will only leave with you and myself, this one reflection: Our subject holds out to each of us this awful alternative; we must either become truly holy, or sell our birthright, as rational beings, and sink

ourselves far below the brutes. We must either love and serve our Creator, or share the dreadful guilt and punishment of his enemies. Let us then make our choice. But O let us choose life, that we may live, and not die.

*FINIS.*

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